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AUGUST NUMBER 18

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The Super Team Spirit
DC's SUPER-TEAMS of The 1960's
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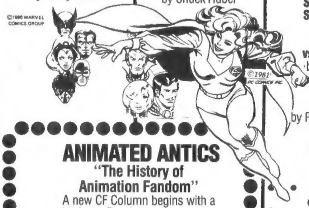

SUPER-MAN FAMILY
by Rich Morrissey

DC & Marvel Presents SUPER-MAN/ SPIDER-MAN AND BAT-MAN vs. The HULK
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The HULK
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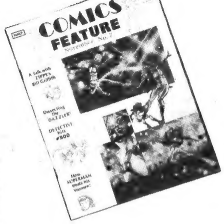

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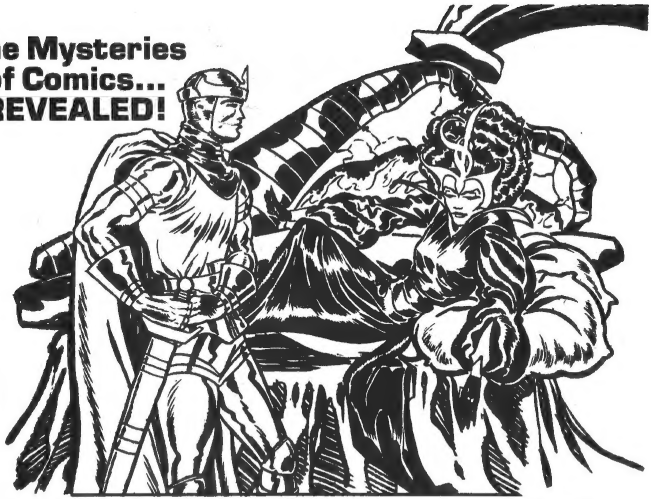

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Every issue of **COMICS FEATURE** brings you information, interviews, columns, and special features which deal with every phase of comics.

- Our news section brings you the latest happenings in the industry.
- Our interviews consistently feature profiles of the most important and interesting comics professionals—past and present. Last year we interviewed Roy Thomas, Steve Englehart, Marv Wolfman, Steve Gerber, Frank Miller, and Leonard Starr. Upcoming in the next year are Mary Jo Duffy, John Byrne, Bill Mantlo, Max Allen Collins, and Stan Drake.
- Our articles spotlight both capable analysis and reviews of comics trends, as well as valuable historical research. **FEATURE** has lately presented Margaret O'Connell's **"Women and Power in Comics"** series, Murray R. Ward's **"Super-Team Spirit"** overview of every comics super-team, and Chuck Wooley's **"Lost Comics Companies."**
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HEADLINES

MARVEL DEVELOPS NEW TITLES

MARVEL ANNOUNCES EPIC COMICS

Marvel plans the beginning of a new, semi-independent comics line within their regular line of comics. Billed as the "Epic Comics" line, it will differ from the regular line of Marvel Comics in that the creators will retain copyright ownership of their own properties. Marvel will publish, promote and distribute the comics, and the creators and Marvel will share in the revenues of both single-copy sales and in any licensing and merchandising monies.

The comics will be printed on higher quality paper stock than the regular Marvel Comics (either Baxter stock — used in the "**Star-Lord**" package — or the coated stock on which **MARVEL FANFARE** is printed), and the cover price per issue will be about $2.00.

"Epic Comics" will hope to attract talent which has either left the comics industry due to comics' immovable insistence on copyright ownership, or which continues to work for the companies, yet only on established properties. Marvel's contract, which still had not been signed by the initial contenders by **FEATURE**'s press time, is substantially similar to the deal offered to Frank Miller by **DC** (for Miller's **RONIN** property). Marvel hopes to attract talent of similar stature for their own "Epic Comics" line, and among those mentioned are Jim Starlin, Steve Englehart, Steve Leialoha, and Chris Claremont.

Spokespeople for Marvel Comics hope to be able to announce the first "Epic Comic" in the very near future.

MARVEL TO LAUNCH NEW HIGH QUALITY REPRINT SERIES

Marvel will be producing an experimental line of high-quality reprint comics designed for the comics-fan tastes. The packages will be printed on Baxter stock (as was the "**Star-Lord**" reprint package of last year) and will probably be priced at between $1.50 and $2.00 per package. The number of pages per issue in the series may well vary depending on how much material Marvel decides to put in each, and that will affect pricing as well.

The first reprint is of the entirety of the Jim Starlin "**Warlock**" series. This has been proposed as a six-part mini-series of 48 pages per issue. It will include each of Warlock's appearances in **STRANGE TALES**, the issues of the **WARLOCK** comic that Starlin spearheaded, **AVENGERS ANNUAL #7** and **MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE ANNUAL #2** (which featured the two concluding chapters of the "**Warlock**" epic, both by Starlin), and **MARVEL TEAM-UP #55** ("**Spider, Spider, On the Moon**," with Spider-Man and Warlock, by Bill Mantlo and John Byrne), which is considered a necessary part of the story. The finished story should run to something like 283 pages. Marvel hopes to commission new covers for the volumes (preferably by Starlin) and to include historically-enlightening editorial pages.

The second reprint series will be the original "**Silver Dagger**" story from **DOCTOR STRANGE #'s 1, 2, 4,** and **5**, by Steve Englehart and Frank Brunner. This will be run in fewer individual issues, since the story itself only runs four issues of **DOCTOR STRANGE** (issue #3 was a Lee/Ditko reprint), or approximately 72 pages.

WILL THE CREATORS OWN THE NEXT MARVEL SUPER CLASSIC ?

DC TO BEGIN NEW PUBLICATION FOR NEO-PROFESSIONALS

DC Comics is beginning a new publication designed for the purpose of giving almost-full professionals a berth in which to polish their craft and break into the business full-time. "The series will feature work by new professionals, not amateurs," declares editor Marv Wolfman. "Amateurs aren't close enough to being professionals. They might have some talent, but not near enough training, or self-discipline, or professionalism of attitude. They might never make it. New professionals might have some professional work under their belts — they might not — but they mainly need some help from a professional editor to get them up to the point at which they can be assigned work by any editor. They need a little more experience and a little more polish, but most of the training is already there."

Wolfman mentions that the series is designed to fill the void left in the industry by the mystery, love, and (to a lesser extent) war comics, in which the attraction of each genre was strong enough to allow the artists and writers a certain amount of leeway to develop, without having the fate of a series rest on their unready heads. He hastens to explain, though, that the new **DC** "training" series will not suffer inferior work. "I want it to be competitive with any comic coming out today. I want the fact that it features new professionals to be an item of interest for the fan market, not a detriment in the regular buyer's eyes. In **HOUSE OF MYSTERY**, **UNEXPECTED**, and those books, where Len [Wein], Gerry [Conway], Berni [Wrightson], and myself — among others — got their start, we had to turn out material that was good enough that the regular reader would enjoy it and buy the next issue, same as with any comic. There weren't any allowances made for the fact that we were learning — not on the part of the buying public. You can expect the editor to have patience above and beyond the call of duty, but you can't expect the audience to."

The series will feature as many as four stories per issue, filling a 32-page, no-ad package. It will retail for whatever the line price is at the time (currently 60¢). It will pay professional rates for accepted work. ("Beginner's rates," specifies Wolfman, "but professional rates nonetheless.") It will be distributed through both the newsstand and direct-sales channels and will be a monthly — at least at the outset.

Marv Wolfman

DC characters will not appear in the publication, although any character which appears in it will automatically become **DC**'s property. In the even that a character becomes popular enough to generate either merchandising or a spin-off series, the standard creator's benefits will apply.

DC has guaranteed Wolfman a nine-month lead time in order to attract and counsel a sufficient battery of young new professionals to sustain a monthly project of this nature. Also, according to Wolfman, **DC** has made a commitment to keep the book running for an undisclosed amount of time "even if it doesn't sell. **DC** realizes the need to train new professionals if there's going to be any new talent — **useable** talent — for us in the future. And we're putting our money where our mouth is."

DC's project follows in the path recently hewed by **CHARLTON BULLSEYE** (which differs in that they do not retain character copyright, do not pay any money for contributions, and require camera-ready material, so editorial input must necessarily be kept to a minimum) and New Media Publishing's **RISING STAR** (which offers editorial guidance, paid minimal page rates, and allows creators to retain copyright of their characters).

Concerning the still-unnamed status of the **DC** series, Wolfman commented to **FEATURE**: "I love the name of your **RISING STAR** magazine. I wish we could use that." The name and logo were chosen and designed by **NMP**'s then-production manager Richard Howell.

Wolfman states that so far he has attracted mainly writers, although he expects some of the artists to come from **DC** Managing Editor Dick Giordano's artist seminar program. There will shortly be an advertisement for the series appearing in all the fanzines and Wolfman expects to be swamped with submissions after that. "Please tell them," he appends, "to enclose their names, addresses, telephone numbers, and a stamped, self-addressed envelope. You'd be surprised how many people send us submissions and then don't tell us who they are or how to reach them."

WONDER WOMAN TO CHANGE WRITERS

WONDER WOMAN will now be written by Dan Mishkin (of Mishkin & Cohn) following a three-issue series plotted by Roy Thomas which involves video games. Editor Marv Wolfman plans for the book to work more with what it already has going for it: "In other words, we're not going to do yet **another** face-lift, **another** 'new' Wonder Woman — there's one of those every two years. We're going to get more into the characters and what makes them tick. We're going to explore the relationship between Steve Trevor and Wonder Woman.

I think we should show that Steve is a very capable, very smart individual. He has to be very good to be where he is, and he has to be very good for Wonder Woman to be in love with him, since objectively she **is** smarter, stronger, better than he is in every way. It's going to be tricky, but I think we can make the readers care about these characters and understand why their relationship works."

Gene Colan will be remaining on **WONDER WOMAN**'s artwork chores, and Frank McLaughlin will be continuing on as inker.

WONDER WOMAN #300 will be a special 72-page issue detailing the life of the Amazon princess and demonstrating how her life would have changed if she had chosen differently at different crucial junctures in her life. "In other words," comments editor Wolfman, "we're bringing the 'What If?' concept back to DC where it originated. Y'see, Roy Thomas goes off into Gardner Fox's "What If?" room, and..." The issue will be plotted and scripted by Roy Thomas and drawn by several different artists (as with the Golden Age **ALL-STAR COMICS**), each drawing a chapter. The first and last chapters will be drawn by WW-artist Gene Colan, and of the others, only Jan Duursema and George Perez have been confirmed. Also mentioned as possibilities are Rich Buckler and Mike Sekowsky. The story will feature the final Simon and Kirby creaton, the Sandman (from **SANDMAN #1**, 1974).

ARAK, ALL STAR TO CHANGE ARTISTS

Both of Roy Thomas' regular series at DC are changing artists in the near future. Adrian Gonzales, penciller of **ALL-STAR SQUADRON** since issue #6, will be leaving after issue #17. Gonzales will be replaced by Jerry Ordway, the present inker of the series, who will assume the pencilling chores and remain on the inks. Ordway has been **ALL-STAR**'s regular inker since the series' premiere appearance as an insert in **JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #193. ARAK, SON OF THUNDER #15** will be drawn by Adrian Gonzales and inked by Alfredo Alcala. Alcala has pencilled and inked the previous few issues following the departure of the series' original penciller Ernie Colón.

Thomas is somewhat dismayed about these changes, in that he feels an ever-rotating art staff "hurts the long-term acceptance of a series," but is not opposed to either of the choices. "Jerry wanted to pencil and ink a series," explains Thomas, "so that meant that either he or Adrian had to go. I think that the decision was made on the basis of Jerry having been there since the beginning and having his finishing style more associated with the look of the series than anyone's pencils." It is not decided yet whether or not Gonzales will remain as **ARAK**'s permanent penciller, but Thomas reports that he is very pleased with the mesh of Gonzales' work and the inking of Alfredo Alcala.

Thomas has also left both **CAPTAIN CARROT AND HIS AMAZING ZOO CREW** and **WONDER WOMAN**, although he will be writing the upcoming **WONDER WOMAN #300** (see separate story).

Upcoming in **ALL-STAR SQUADRON** will be the return of the JSA to semi-regular status, due to a loosening of **DC**'s original

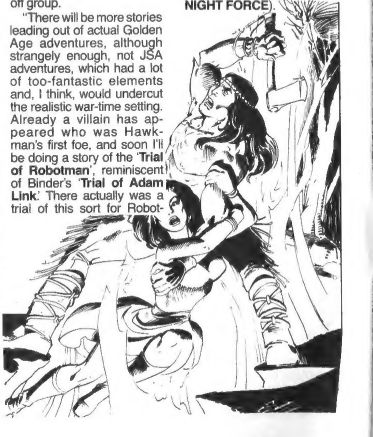
ROY THOMAS

wishes that the super-heroes who had active Earth-One counterparts be kept out of the Earth-Two-based **ALL-STAR** whenever possible, and also that, in the series' timeline itself, the two-month minimum that the JSA would have believably have to have served in the armed forces will be elapsing shortly. Hawkman, the Atom, Wonder Woman, Superman, and Starman, among others, will shortly be appearing in the series devoted to their spin-off group.

"There will be more stories leading out of actual Golden Age adventures, although strangely enough, not JSA adventures, which had a lot of too-fantastic elements and, I think, would undercut the realistic war-time setting. Already a villain has appeared who was Hawkman's first foe, and soon I'll be doing a story of the '**Trial of Robotman**', reminiscent of Binder's '**Trial of Adam Link**.' There actually was a trial of this sort for Robot-man, one to determine whether or not he had any status as a human under the law, in his own series in **STAR-SPANGLED COMICS.** I'm just using that story as a spring-board for mine — and I've found roles for Johnny Quick, Liberty Belle, etc." The All-Stars will also encounter Doctor Daka, the villain from the first "Batman" movie serial.

Part of the continuing story-line in **ARAK** concerning his quest for his ancestry will come to a climax in issue #14. The back-up series featuring Valda, daughter of Bradamante, will continue for the foreseeable future. Thomas comments that he thinks of it as "permanent."

According to Thomas, the paperwork and financial details concerning his assuming the writer/editor position over **ARAK** have not yet been worked out. Although he, Gerry Conway, and Marv Wolfman have each been promised writer/editor status on at least one regular series, so far only the New York-based Wolfman's position has changed officially (he is writer/editor of **NIGHT FORCE**).



IN OTHER NEWS

Marv Wolfman assumes the editing chores on **THE BLACKHAWKS** with issue #2 (#1 was edited by Len Wein). The creative team remains Mark Evanier and Dan Spiegle. The cover of the first issue is by Dave Cockrum, who, like Wolfman and Evanier, is also a fan of the original series. The series' logo will be by Tom Orzechowski (a streamlined and cleaned-up version of the original logo). Issue #2 will feature the return of the War Wheel, one of editor Wolfman's favorite "**Blackhawk**" menaces. "I liked it so much," comments Wolfman, "that I swiped it for **SPIDER-MAN**."

The series will feature book-lengthers for at least the first half-dozen issues, then may begin experimenting with two-story issues.

NIGHT FORCE #3 will be, according to writer/editor Marv Wolfman, a "special no-horror issue," in which nothing horrible or supernatural happens. Wolfman claims that "since the series is paced like a novel, there's no need to have the concept restated and redone in every issue. Number three is mainly characterization, since it's a relatively quiet time in the characters' lives. This book is supposed to be experimental, so doing an issue like this is a necessary part of seeing what will work in comics now." The subsequent issue takes the action to the Soviet Union.

DC SNIPPETTS

There is some chance that the fourth of the series of **Marvel/DC** team-up volumes (Justice League of America and the Avengers, produced by **DC**) will be co-written by Roy Thomas and Gerry Conway.

This summer's **ALL-STAR SQUADRON ANNUAL** will feature a line-up of super-characters who, for the most part, are not regular members of the WWII "second team": Wonder Woman, Green Lantern, Flash, Wildcat, and the Atom (all full-time JSA'ers) will be joined by Simon and Kirby's Guardian (without the Newsboy Legion). According to scripter Roy Thomas, this adventure will take place on the Guardian's first night as a costumed "mystery man," the night **before** the Newsboy Legion met him in his super-identity.

The Omega Men, the creations of Marv Wolfman, and Joe Staton from their collaboration on **GREEN LANTERN**, will be getting their own regular series, probably in their own book. The series will be drawn by Keith Giffen (regular **LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES** penciller) and written by Roger Slifer (of **DC**'s direct sales department).

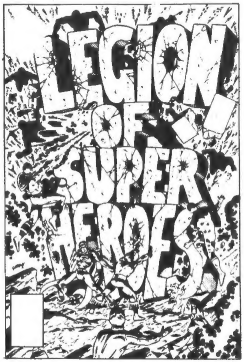
Stan Goldberg, of "**Archie**" and **MILLIE THE MODEL** fame, has done fill-in on **CAPTAIN CARROT AND THE AMAZING ZOO CREW**. According to reports, the **DC** staff were "very, very pleased" with Goldberg's work and he might be doing more assignments for **DC**.

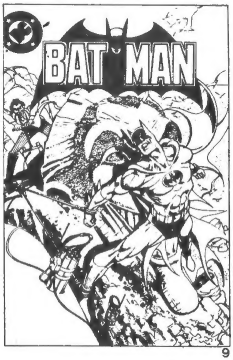
Issue #7 of **CAPTAIN CARROT AND HIS AMAZING ZOO CREW** will feature several "who they are and what they're like" character profile pages.

SUPERGIRL BEGINS NEW LIFE IN NEW TITLE

The **HISTORY OF THE DC UNIVERSE** maxi-series, to be plotted and scripted by Wein and Wolfman and drawn by George Perez, has been put on the schedule for next July. Peter Sanderson will be retained by DC as a research consultant for the project.

Alan Brennert is scheduled to take over the writing of "**The Huntress**" series in **WONDER WOMAN**. Although Joe Staton has almost entirely left **DC**, he will "probably" retain the Huntress' series.





MARVEL SNIPPETTS

The double-sized **DAZZLER #21** will wrap up several long-standing plot threads of that series, and a new continuing conflict will be introduced.

The new appearance of the Black Widow in **DAREDEVIL** involves Natasha being poisoned and she and DD trailing the only person who can cure her. It will be a four-part series, ending in #190, a double-sized issue. The resolution of the series will also temporarily settle Matt's troubled love life.

The new artist on the **MICRONAUTS** series, replacing Gil Kane, is Mike Vosburg. Danny Bulanadi will continue on as inker. Future issues will detail the fate of Devil.

This summer's **X-MEN ANNUAL** will again spotlight Dracula's courtship of Storm, and his efforts to secure the Montesi formula (an arcane chant which can turn vampires into dust) with Ororo's lockpicking help.

The **ROM ANNUAL** will be by Bill Mantlo and Pat Broderick and will re-emphasize the series' science fiction roots with: "**It Came From Outer Space.**"

This year's **CAPTAIN AMERICA ANNUAL** will feature "each of the four men who wore the Captain America uniform." It will also feature the return of Jack Kirby's Mr. Buda, from the **CAPTAIN AMERICA'S BI-CENTENNIAL BATTLES** tabloid.

KA-ZAR will be shot in the head during an upcoming visit to civilization. Reports indicate that it will give him amnesia and spark off a continuing series of Ka-Zar being lost in the city.

Upcoming in **X-MEN** is the horrible secret of the Brood, the marauding aliens who appeared in #155-8. This story-line is designed to lead into the upcoming **NEW MUTANTS** series.

The **WOLVERINE** limited series will end with a permanent change in the life of the homicidal X-Man.

Future issues of **THE AVENGERS**, under new writer Roger Stern will tie up the present confusion over Yellowjacket's recent actions. The new Captain Marvel will join the group, and Hawkeye may leave again soon.

The final issue of **BIZARRE ADVENTURES** to appear as a regularly-published periodical will feature "Horror." It is designed to save Marvel's copyrights over certain series, names and characters, from the horror comic explosion of the middle 1970s. Among those characters mentioned are the Zombie (from **TALES OF THE ZOMBIE**) and Dracula. The stories will be written by De Matteis and Moench, among others. In the future, **BIZARRE ADVENTURES** will appear whenever Marvel feels that they have enough thematically-similar material to fill an issue. The next planned issue is an upcoming "Perverse Christmas Tales" issue, although probably it will not appear under that name.

Joe Sinnott has returned to inking Sal Buscema's pencils on **THE HULK**. According to reports, Sinnott requested to ink that series several years ago, and did an extremely good job inking one issue, but at the time Buscema's desire to ink all of his own work prevailed. Eventually Sinnott became regular inker on **ROM**, leading to his present position of regular inker on both of Sal Buscema's books.

Denny O'Neil is now the regular writer of **IRON MAN**. He has also done a few fill-in issues of **POWERMAN/ IRON FIST** in between the Duffy issues and the upcoming Layton ones.

Mary Jo Duffy may be writing several issues of the Marvel "team-up" books. She has been offered as many issues as she wants to write.

IRON MAN ANNUAL #5 guest-stars the Black Panther and his personal nemesis Eric Killmonger. Ralph Macchio and Jerry Bingham are the creative team.

MARVEL PAPERBACK #7 features "**Blade Runner**" by Goodwin, Williamson, and Garzon. Number 8 will feature the Avengers and reprint **AVENGERS #57, 58,** and **83** (the first appearance and origin of the Vision, and the first Valkyrie story).

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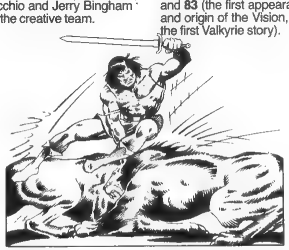

KING CONAN #13—Written by DOUG MOENCH. Pencils by MARK SYLVESTRI. Circles of Sorcery —As sorcerous foes converge on Aquilonia **Conan** must discover the reason behind their attack or lose both his kingdom and his life.

MISC NEWS BITS

ELFQUEST #13 will appear in late June and will contain "The Secret of the Wolfriders." This story will feature a threat from the elves' past, a plot by Winnowill, and the deepening of the mystery or Recognition for Tyldak and Dewshine. The story which will introduce "Egg," Blue Mountain's most bizarre occupant will also provide additional clues which may link the Gliders with the High Ones.

Deni Sims has announced that she has begun talks with Bill Loebs, who has been drawing the Unique Stories filler feature for **CEREBUS**. It seems that his adventures of Ben Franklin have proved popular enough to possibly support their own title. Sims has also stated that there are plans for a comic book to publish the material by Marshall Rogers, Joe Rubenstein and Gene Day which previously appeared in the pages of the **SWORDS OF CEREBUS** but never in actual comic book format.

Nobel Comics, the publishers of **JUSTICE MACHINE**, plan a summer annual which will run a total of 62 pages and among other features will contain an epic battle between the characters of the book and the **THUNDER AGENTS** now being published by Joe Carbonaro. The cover will be by Neal Adams. Issue four of the regular series will feature the return of Cobalt Blue picking up the story begun in **COBALT BLUE #1** which was published by Power Comics. The book will also present a new team, Free Force, and will feature a cover by Paul Gulacy. A portfolio of the Justice Machine is also planned and will contain work from Rich Buckler, Jerry Bingham, Mike Golden and Mike Grell.

NEW MEDIA IS ALIVE AND WELL, AND LIVING IN FLORIDA

In a paraphrase of Mark Twain **NMP** Publisher Hal Schuster stated that "reports of our death are a gross exaggeration as NMP is alive and well and living in Florida." Reports of the demise of New Media IRJAX, Inc., the distribution company which had also been owned by the Schusters, had led many to believe that the publishing arm of the company would soon follow suit. The two companies are separate corporations and the fate of one does not greatly influence the continuation of the other. NMI had run into severe troubles with bad receivables and as a result has filed for a Chapter Eleven reorganization. NMP has since changed several members of its staff and moved its operations to new quarters. However, for the first time in over a year, NMP has begun to release its titles in a timely fashion.

Stating that the demise of the distribution company may actually be beneficial to the publising company, Schuster went on to say that he feels that many of the distributors who previously did not handle NMP titles are now doing so only because they are no longer competitors. "It always leads t a strained relationship when your supplier is also one of your major competitors," said Schuster. In recent months such distributors as Pacific Comics, Longhorn Books, and Glenwood Distribution have begun to carry the **NMP** titles, books which they had not carried before.

On March first **NMP** Assistant Publisher Carol Kalish took a position as Assistant Direct Sales Manager of Marvel Comics (and has since been promoted to Manager) and both Kalish and Production Manager Richard Howell moved to New Jersey. This caused the closing of the Cambridge office and the moving of facilities to Florida. Howell has remained on as both editor of the line of graphic magazines and as New York Editor of Comics Feature but was unable to continue his daily production duties on the entire line of publications. This necessitated the hiring of a new Assistant Publisher who would also be responsible for the production details. "I went out and looked for the best. Not necessarily the best known comics fan but the best professional artist and production man available, preferably one with a deep interest in comics, and I was very lucky to find one locally in Robert E. Lewis who has since done nothing but impress me with his ability. Yes, I think we got very lucky," stated **NMP** Publisher Hal Schuster. Schuster went on to say, "I am also happy that Richard will be able to devote all of his time to launching and building our line of comic magazines and also of course to seeing that Comics Feature has the most complete and accurate news section around. While I am very sorry to lose the excellent work of Carol Kalish I do feel that we have built an even stronger staff than before and with the help of our line editors we plan to undertake our most ambitious publishing program ever. And we plan to put them out on time!"

COMICS FEATURE, the flagship title of NMP, has added several new columnists to its roster. Jim Korkis, long known for his writing in the field of animation for such publications as **THE COMICS JOURNAL**, **THE COMIC READER**, and **ANIMANIA** has begun "Animated Antics," a column which will feature both reviews of current work and historical masterpieces of animation. "Strip Tease" is a new strip by Rick Norwood and will concern itself with newspaper strips. At least one additional column is also planned.

LOC, FANDOM'S FORUM has been totally revamped. Stating weak sales and lack of clear editorial direction as the reasons Editor Bob Lewis has announced several new sections. "We will be keeping the columns of opinion, long letter columns and humorous strips readers have come to expect while adding material which we feel will make the publication exciting and a must read item," said Lewis. The new sections will be Fandom's Forum, Fandom Showcase and Fandom Spotlight, a previously irregular feature which will now appear in every issue. Fandom's Forum will feature

COBALT BLUE

CURSED EARTH BOOK TWO will be the third volume in the series of books issued by Titan and containing reprints of The Chronicles of Judge Dredd. The volume will contain: "The Coming of Satanus," "Picnic at Black Rock," "Black Sabbath," "The God Judge," "Tweak's Story," "Legion of the Damned," "Dredd's Last Stand," and "Death Crawl."

Point Blank Productions has released a limited edition print of "Star" a painting by Paul Gulacy originally produced for the cover of **ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED #2. ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED** is a publication of New Media Publishing and should be released in late June.

columns deliberately provoking debate and will then print the most interesting responses from the readership. The reader whose work is published will receive a prize upon the publication of their work. Other responses will appear on the letters page. Fandom Showcase will present fan fiction in one section and a ten page gallery of artwork submitted by the readership in another. The first fiction to be printed is by Dwight Decker, the co-editor of **AMAZING HEROES**. Finally, Fandom Spotlight will begin to serve a need currently unfilled by any other publication. The feature will spotlight the alternative publishers and the artists and writers who do the work for such publications as **NEXUS, JUSTICE MACHINE, PACIFIC COMICS** and many others. The staff of the magazine feels that the growth of this sector of the market and the tendency of other publications to cover only creators working with the **Marvel** and **DC** universe creates a need for such a publication. The first installment of the new series will appear in the sixth issue and will feature an interview with Mike Baron, the author of **NEXUS**. The following two issues will present interviews with Steve Schanes of Pacific Comics and Su Fillmore and Mike Gustovich of **JUSTICE MACHINE.**

THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMICS, a new bimonthly title edited by Don Thompson, is scheduled for release beginning in September. The magazine will present articles about Golden Age superheroes, interview the people who worked on the books, present comprehensive indexes, publish cover galleries, and run classic stories in their entirety. Don Thompson is well known for his previous books **All In Color for a Dime** and **The Comic Book Book**.

After many delays **FANTASY ILLUSTRATED** has now been released and **ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED** number two is scheduled for immediate release. FI contains a lineup which reads like a who's who of comics with work by Craig Russell, Tom Sutton, Mike Sekowsky, Al Gordon, Steve Ditko, Steve Leiloha, Steve Englehart, Mark Evanier, and Don McGregor. Editor Richard Howell stated that he felt "that this is the best magazine the company has ever published."

RISING STAR has suffered a temporary delay when disagreements between the artist and writer of the Vanguard strip and the publisher reached an impasse and the strip was withdrawn. Bob Lewis has replaced the material with a story of his Also planned for appearance in that title is a new superhero, Hawkwind, the creation of Olsson and Adams. The title is scheduled for summer release.

2 Pages from MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL #24 — X-Men/Teen Titans

Animation News

SATURDAY MORNING DAREDEVIL

One of the projects in development for next season's Saturday morning was an animated series based on Marvel's **DAREDEVIL.** Marvel Animation submitted a premise to the network which bore very little resemblance to the **DAREDEVIL** comic that most fans know. For one thing, it had Daredevil driving about in a van with a cannon in the back so that he could shoot himself up to a rooftop to prevent crimes. How many crimes take place on rooftops? Apparently not enough because the writer of the pilot eliminated that concept. Karen Page was also eliminated. Instead, Matt Murdock has a niece who works around the law office of Nelson and Murdock and supposedly aids **D.D.** in his crime-stopping. Like most Saturday morning series, there is also a dog in the series but fortunately he doesn't talk. The dog is Matt's seeing-eye dog. A strong pilot script was written that received high praise from the network. However, **ABC** has decided to concentrate even more on comedy for next season so the **DAREDEVIL** project has been filed away until the following season.

Besides a half hour **HULK** animated cartoon which will be teamed with episodes of **SPIDER-MAN AND HIS AMAZING FRIENDS,** Marvel Animation is also working on an animated project entitled **MAGIC AND MONSTERS.** It looks like a comedy project from Marvel, **PANDAMONIUM** about lovable panda bears, will definitely be joining the Saturday morning lineup while some of the more adventure-oriented projects are shoved aside.

It hasn't been explained how Marvel intends to handle so many projects since its core of artist/animators is so small (Larry Houston, Dick Sebast, Will Meugniot, Rick Hoberg and a few free-lancers), and those folks are not only responsible for the **SPIDER-MAN AND HIS AMAZING FRIENDS,** the new as-yet-unreleased syndicated **SPIDER-MAN** show, the new Marvel Animation projects but were also given the chore of ghosting some of Marvel's newspaper strips. All reports indicate that Stan Lee is highly active at the company and all changes in Marvel's characters and concepts have been made with Lee's participation although not necessarily his agreement.

WALT DISNEY'S FIRST STUDIO SOLD

On Sunday, March 23, ten people pooled their money to purchase the wood-frame garage that was Walt Disney's first studio.

Paul C. Maher, the owner of the garage, purchased the building at 4406 Kingswell Avenue in Hollywood more than a year ago when the owner was going to tear it down to make room for a two-car garage. Maher lost his lease on the house at the front of the Kingswell lot and had to make arrangements to move the garage. Maher has been attempting to establish a children's television museum in Hollywood. (Two years ago, he even organized a children's television film festival.) Thus, he decided to auction off the garage to help finance his dream. No one could come up with the $10,000 minimum bid that was set for the structure but eventually ten people agreed to put up $8,500 to buy it. The garage has now been moved but its fate is still undetermined. The Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History has all of Disney's original animation equipment and it has been suggested that perhaps some type of an arrangement can be made between the owners of the garage and the museum.

The site of Disney's better known studio on Hyperion is now a shopping plaza. A small historical marker from the City of Los Angeles adorns a nearby telephone pole, to inform people of this fact. It is disheartening to watch overweight matrons push their shopping carts where once young men with dreams tried to get a mouse to move. Disney's current studio in Burbank is fortunately still in good shape.

QUICK BITS

Nelvana, the company responsible for such wonderful television animation as **THE DEVIL AND DANIEL MOUSE,** will have their new feature length animated cartoon released by **MGM/UA** in late August or early September. Previously titled DRATS, it is now to be known as **ROCK AND RULE.** Nelvana has also signed an agreement with Richard and Wendy Pini to produce an animated version of ELFQUEST....Paramount has picked up Hanna-Barbera's **HEIDI'S SONG,** a sequel to the popular Heidi story, which has been completed for quite some time now but could not find a distributor... Dr. Alberto Becattini of Italy is attempting to put together a book which will list in checklist form the work of various writers and artists on the Disney comic books. Horst Schroder of Sweden attempted a similar project several years ago but couldn't quite get it completed... Friz Freleng has left Warner Brothers and reliable sources state that he will turn up at Hanna-Barbera as a consultant. Freleng was honored in April in France where he was invited as Honorary President for a festival of animation which included a retrospective of his work ... Look for a copy of WHO CENSORED ROGER RABBIT? by Gary Wolf (St. Martins Press. $10.95). It is being turned into a Disney film set for release next year. The story concerns a world where animated cartoon characters live side-by-side with "real" folks...

BLADE RUNNER SKETCH BOOK

BLADE RUNNER is set in an eerie future of "retro-fitted" technology. This book compiles the many highlights of the tremendous design work that went into creating the urban life of the year 2019. Spotlighted are the costumes, vehicles, street fixtures, weaponry, and much more. The artwork is executed in black and white, including work by Syd Mead, Mentor Huebner, David Snyder, and even a few by director Ridley Scott. The format is quality trade paperback. Page count and size are approximately 96 pages, 11″ × 8½″. Order now for shipment right off the press.

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THE ILLUSTRATED BLADE RUNNER

The complete script to the blockbuster film, containing the dialogue and stage directions *just as they were handed to the stars*. This fascinating presentation is profusely and magnificently illustrated with specially selected storyboards used in the production. These storyboards are the tools used by the crew to visualize this unbelievably believable panorama of the future. Trade paperback, approximately 8½″ × 11″, 128 pages.

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Twelve high-gloss, action photos of Harrison Ford and cast in pivotal moments from the film. Full-color, sharp images ready for instant display. Produced on high-quality stock, all twelve reproductions capture the action and suspense of **BLADE RUNNER**. Each plate is approximately 9¼″ × 12″, and is packaged in a handsome illustrated folder, making it the perfect gift item for any science fiction/fantasy movie or media event fan. Relive the movie excitement with this unique limited edition. Order Now!

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HARRISON FORD IS...

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THE MOTION PICTURE

Scheduled to be released on June 25, 1982 to 1,200 theaters coast to coast, this $20 million production directed by Ridley "Alien" Scott, with effects by Doug "2001" Trumbull, is sure to be the movie event of the year. Pacific Comics proudly introduces three new Blue Dolphin Enterprises publications presenting a fascinating insight into the research and development that created **BLADE RUNNER**. Publication dates are scheduled to tie in with the film's release.

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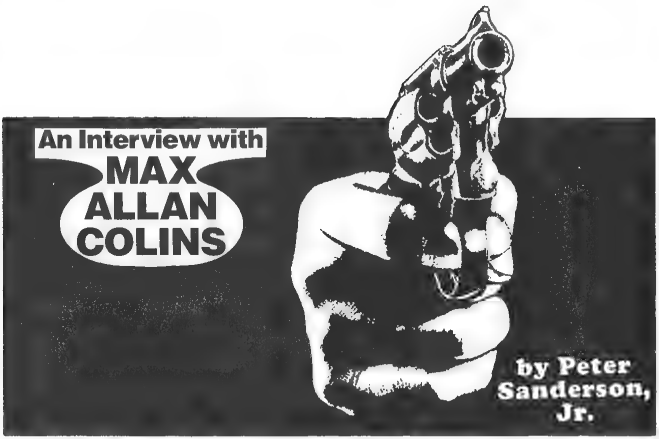


Whereas there have been novelists who have done a small amount of work in comics, and comics writers with one or a few novels to their credit, there are very few authors who have made a steady career in both comics writing and prose fiction writing. One of the latter is Max Allan Colins, whose work in revitalizing the *DICK TRACY* newspaper strip I described in this issue's year-end review section.

Over the last year Eclipse Enterprises has published two of his collaborations with cartoonist Terry Beatty. *MS. TREE* attempts to do for the classic American detective story what *MODESTY BLAISE* did to the James Bond story: it casts a determined, highly capable woman in the lead role of a genre we almost always associate with male heroes. Over the course of the first half-dozen issues of *ECLIPSE* magazine, Ms. Tree has conducted an affecting and intriguing hunt for the killer of her husband, who resembled one of the hard-boiled fictional detectives of old, and Collins and Beatty have more plans for Ms. Tree once the current story-line is resolved.

Eclipse has also published a collection of *THE MIKE MIST MINUTE MISTERIES*, often entertaining one-page puzzles in crime detection which Collins and Beatty originally did for newspaper publication.

Whereas Collins' comics work depicts a world of heroes who succeed in searching out and putting an end to evil, his novels portray a far grimmer reality. Quarry, the protagonist of *THE BROKER* and *THE BROKER'S WIFE* (both, unfortunately, out of print) is a Vietnam veteran whom the war taught to be indifferent towards killing, and who became a hired assassin. Nolan, the central figure of Collins' current ongoing series (which so far includes the novels *BAIT MONEY, BLOOD MONEY FLY PAPER*, and the recent *HUGH MONEY*), is a tough-minded middle-aged professional thief, who, oddly enough, teams up with Jon, a young comics fan who steals to support his collecting habit. The Quarry and Nolan novels provide convincing, penetrating looks at the mental processes of men who have strict moral standards in some areas, but who are disturbingly amoral in others. In the world of Collins' novels, virtually everyone is guilty of something, even the supposed heroes; plans never work out the way they are intended, and nearly always end in failure; success in getting a great deal of money, or sometimes even love, is often either temporary or nonexistent; and crime rarely pays, not because of the efforts of a Tracy or Ms. Tree—who do not exist in this world—but because of the threats posed by other criminals, and the machinations of fate.

As a writer of both prose novels and comics, Collins offers a unique perspective on writing in this interview that one seldom finds in magazines of this sort. To put it simply, rather than continually talking about fiction *WRITING FOR COMICS*, he discusses the process and essence of fiction *WRITING* itself.

The mystery and detection genres have been sadly neglected in mainstream comics. It is to be hoped that Collins' successes with comics of these kinds will inspire other to follow his lead.

The following interview was conducted by myself at the Chicago Comicon on July 18, 1981, was transcribed by Bob Soron, and edited by Collins and Richard Howell.

--Peter Sanderson

SANDERSON: Now, the earliest event I know about in your life is that you started reading *DICK TRACY* when you were age five...

COLLINS: Apparently, yes—I'm not quite sure. I think I was five or six.

SANDERSON: ...And that your first contact with Chester Gould was through a letter you wrote him when you were age eight...

COLLINS: That's real close. Actually, my mother wrote the letter. I was sitting around the house, drawing pictures of Dick Tracy, and she scooped them up and sent some of them to Chester Gould, and told him that I had a birthday coming up. So, on my eighth birthday—actually, it was a couple days after my eighth birthday—I received in the mail this letter from Chester Gould, wishing me a happy birthday. It was an elaborate drawing of Dick Tracy saying hello to me, with Tracy tell me that I drew his picture better than any other kid my age in the country. It was just a wonderful letter. In fact, I carried it around with me just for *months* (laughs) and I still have it, framed, in my office at home.

It was really a key event in my life—I think it had a lot to do with getting into the arts as a profession.

SANDERSON: Now, what is it that attracted you to *DICK TRACY* even at age five? You don't think of little children reading a blood-and-thunder strip like that.

COLLINS: Well, my mother introduced me to it, actually. She had followed the strip when she was a young woman; I liked comic books—I was reading *SUPERMAN* and *DONALD DUCK*. In fact, some were read to me, because I was attracted to comic books before I could even read. And, I think because my mother had to read them to me and guide me through them, she picked something that she could stand to read herself. So, she picked *DICK TRACY*. What I think attracted me was the violence and excitement of the stories. I remember very vividly the first couple of covers that I saw, one of which showed bullets flying through the bad guys' brains...

SANDERSON: Ah, so these are the comic books...

COLLINS: Yes. These were the Harvey comic books. It was not the strip. It was not in our local paper.

I remember I still have that comic book—if I had it in front of me I'd give you a more accurate description, but it had a bright red cover, Tracy and Sam Catchem on the wharf, shooting some bad guys who were getting ready to dump one of their fellow members who had fallen out of favor into the water. They had him tied up between a couple of iron pilings. It was an elaborate kind of cement overshoe technique.

Then the other issue that I remember very very vividly is the Model story. It is either the first or second story that I ever read. That's my favorite *DICK TRACY* story. It's quite an atypical *DICK TRACY* story, because it was the story in which Gould brought Junior up to adolescence. Junior had been, for twenty-some years, a little kid, in short pants for many of those years, and the head of the Crimestoppers, and all that stuff. So after all that time, Gould finally brought him up into puberty. That story is about his first love. Junior tries to elope with the girl Model, who is a little bit older than he is. She genunely loves him; but, unbeknownest to Junior, the Model's brother is a juvenile delinquent—the Parking Meter Bandit. Model realizes Junior is still a cop and quite valiantly pretends that she's just been stringing Junior along, and calls him a squirt and a jerk, gets on the bus without him, and leaves him in the dust, as he runs along the side of the bus. It sounds very corny as I describe it, but if you read that story right now, it would still be quite powerful—and I think it's one of the most powerful things that Gould ever did.

SANDERSON: Again it seems what one might think of as rather mature tastes for your age because it was suggested at the artists' panel yesterday* that little children do not care about reading love stories.

COLLINS: Which is, of course, bullshit. It's the fault of the writers and the artists that they're not daring to do real stories. It's the fault of the writers and the artists who are underestimating their audience and having a certain contempt for the people who are keeping them in business.

I *constantly* think that audiences are underestimated. There *are* dummies in the audiences, and audiences *can* be mobs—we've all been in theaters where the audience was a stupid mob—but actually, I think that most readers have got something on the ball. Remember if someone picks up a paperback mystery of a science-fiction novel or a comic book, it indicates intelligence because of the very fact that this person has been attracted to the written word. Even if it is the written word floating in balloons and captions above colorful pictures. It *still* reflects intelligence and imagination. Otherwise, he'd be home, sitting in front of the TV, and doing something more passive.

SANDERSON: I notice there's a line in your third "*Nolan*" book about the people at a comic book convention, in which you say, "Well, they may *look* a bit odd, but actually most of them are quite intelligent."

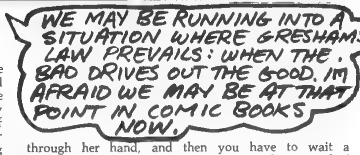
COLLINS: I think at one point I described them by saying "They may look like nebbish Clark Kents, but in reality, they may be the Supermen of tomorrow," which is probably overly optimistic. There are a lot of troubled people into comics...

I must say that that particular description of a comic book convention was written a few years ago, when my own opinions were a little bit different. I'm somewhat more distressed by the fans that I see today. In general. I mean, I don't want to make a blanket condemnation of any set, because one of the delights of a comic book convention to me, since I live out in the middle of a cornfield in Iowa, is to have human beings come up to me who really have read my work and talk to me about it in an intelligent way. The vast majority of the people I run into—at least the ones who seek me out—they're all just terrific. It really makes it worth it to go to these conventions.

But on the other hand, the kind of fan—the young fan who is into the characters and not the artists—the kind of fan who is into the superficiality of it—distresses me a bit. I still say at least they're being attracted to something imaginative, at least they're being attracted to the written word. They may be the way they are because, as creators, we have pandered to them, not uplifted them. We haven't give them a story like Gould's Model story. (I mean, maybe they just haven't *seen* that. Maybe they haven't *seen* something as good as Will Eisner. And they don't know about it. I didn't know about Will Eisner until those Harvey comic books came out back when I was in high school, and they shock me! I said, "I'd never seen comic books this good!" And I hadn't even *heard* of Eisner!)

I'm laying *some* of the blame off on the writers and artists, and not to lay it on them completely, because may of them aren't getting to do what they want to do within the commercial structure, the editorial staff of Marvel or DC, above, which dictates the specific kinds of books and characters that they have to work on. This seems to me to

I'M A JINX, TRACY— A JINX! FIRST MY WIFE IS KILLED, NOW...
SNAP OUT OF IT! SELF-PITY ISN'T GOING TO GET YOU ANYWHERE—
QUIT THINKING ABOUT YOURSELF AND START PRAYING FOR SPARKLE —GIVE HER POSITIVE THOUGHTS, NOT NEGATIVE ONES...
GOULD Waldman COLLINS


WE MAY BE RUNNING INTO A SITUATION WHERE GRESHAMS LAW PREVAILS: WHEN THE BAD DRIVES OUT THE GOOD. IM AFRAID WE MAY BE AT THAT POINT IN COMIC BOOKS NOW.

breed a superficial kind of story.

It also breeds the kind of fan who, for example, will come up to one of the artists in the art room at a convention, and will see someone like Marshall Rogers, let's say, and maybe Marshall is charging more than he did before. So this guy goes over to another artists, and requests a drawing *not* of the character that that artist is known for, but of his or her favorite character. That it would be something like going to Chester Gould and asking him to draw Little Orphan Annie. It's *ridiculous*. It shows a basic lack of understanding, I guess, for the medium, and almost a rudeness. I think it's rude to go to an artist who's famous for *"Batman"* and ask him to draw the X-Men and lay the book out in front of him. Many of these artists grit their teeth and do it.

But that kind of being into the characters and not realizing that the *neat* thing to have would be to have a piece of art by an artist of his or her character. That's what's neat. Not just an original *per se*, or a drawing of your favorite character...

SANDERSON: Something else came up at the artists' panel yesterday—the argument that fans buy the books for the characters—not for the writers or artists—so that, even if a book that used to have a good writer or artist suddenly ends up with a bad writer or artist, the fans will still buy the book.

COLLINS: That distresses me. I still have the gut instinct that the better stuff will prevail, or at least let's say that it *should* prevail. We may be running into a situation where Gresham's Law prevails: when the bad drives out the good. I'm afraid we may be a that point in comic books now. As I see prices going up to 60¢ and 75¢ and the stories in them not really being extra-long or anything special, I can't help but wonder—I can't help but be afraid that the comic book industry is gasping a little bit. It's a little frightening.

I want to finish something I started before I got on the Marvel story, which is, you asked, "Why would a six-year-old kid pick up on something that emotional?"

SANDERSON: That emotional connected to what one thinks of little children consider to be mush.

COLLINS: Correct. But here is something very key. The Harvey *DICK TRACY* comic books sometimes put those stories together in the lousiest fashion. When I was reading them, I was hitting a really good period, when they were really putting those books together nicely. They ended on a terrific cliffhanger. At one of the ends of the *"Model"* story chapters, for instance, Model is shot accidentally by her juvenile delinquent brother. You see the bullet go through her hand, and then you have to wait a month—that's what got me. Model was a character I had come to—I won't say so far as to *love*, but I knew she was a sympathetic character. And I had to wait a month to see if she was going to live. And dammit, she died. Which got me again. I didn't expect her to die. Even though I waited that whole month. And that had an emotional impact on me; it told me some very basic things about storytelling, and some very basic things about suspense. It also seems to me that it was a good example of violence being used in a story in—and this may sound strange—in a positive way.

SANDERSON: Because you've come to care about the character...

COLLINS: Exactly right.

SANDERSON: You recently had Sparkle Plenty getting shot, and I believe you even made reference to Model.

COLLINS: Junior did. He made reference to the Model shooting and it was one of my little ways of paying tribute to Gould, having actually a panel drawn of Model and Junior together, and Junior talking about his fate, to have the women he loves struck down by violence. Of course, *I* struck his wife down with violence when I blew her up in that car. (Laughs)

SANDERSON: Yes, indeed. Blew her back to the moon, so to speak.

COLLINS: Blew her back to the moon.

One of the things that is kind of sad to me is that I don't think Chet really remembers the Model story. I think it was just a throwaway to him. If I point it out to him, I'm sure he'll remember it, but I know that it was not any story that meant anything special to him. He doesn't think it was one of his best stories.

SANDERSON: Which year does that story date from?

COLLINS: They date from the early 1950s, which is my favorite period of Gould, and were reprinted probably about '54. Strangely enough, though—obviously *TRACY* fans will seek me out; I will get letters from fans, because they know it's one of those strange situations where a fan of the strip ended up writing the strip, not just some professional...

SANDERSON: Although it's very common in comic books these days.

COLLINS: It's common in comic books, but very unusual—maybe unique—in a major syndicated comic strip. Now, that is not to put the onus of "fan" on me, because I was a published professional novelist at the time I was approached, but I came up through Chester Gould. I read Chester Gould, and *then* read Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and Mickey Spillane. Gould *led* me into mystery writing—my desire to be a cartoonist led into my desire to be a mystery writer. And, as I said, some of these *TRACY* fans have sought me out. And a lot of them have said, "You know, one of my favorite stories was the Model story. I read that as a kid and I wept throughout. I was moved." I'm not saying I've had a hundred letters on that, but I've had four or five or six people say that to me, and I just said, "Boy, there must have been a magic attached to that story." It must not have been an aberration; I must really have picked up on one of his best stories, even if Gould doesn't know it.

SANDERSON: Now, have you always preferred mystery types of comic books, detective types of comic books, to super-heroes and funny animals?

COLLINS: Not really.

SANDERSON: Because, for example, I notice in your "*Nolan*" books you have a character, Jon, who is a comics collector, and who, after various brushes with violent gunfights and crimes, is weaned away from super-heroes, into, say ECs.

COLLINS: The ECs are a big favorite of mine, Johnny Craig particularly.

SANDERSON: And I was wondering if you have this same attitude towards super-hero comics, that you feel you much prefer reading about real characters and real crime situations?

COLLINS: Okay; let me say a couple things: First, in the "*Nolan*" books, I decided that Jon—and I can't really tell you whether I continued this through the later ones, but in the first three books, I consciously move Jon from one area of collecting into another area of collecting. One of the reasons was simply so that I could deal with a new area of collecting in each book. Another reason was that I thought it might be fun to metaphorically tie the area of collecting and the subject matter of the book. So, in the first "*Nolan*" book, Jon meets up with Nolan, who is the "real-life" version of a super-hero—even though he's a thief, he's a tough guy, he's Clint Eastwood in the flesh—everything is in term's of Batman and Robin—you know, Nolan and Jon as super-heroes. In the second book, after Jon has been brushed with death and violence and has matured a little bit, and bruised a little bit, he's into horror. He's into ECs. He's into *CRIME SUSPENSTORIES*. And he is kidnapped. And he is put through the mill, and there is also a sort of an EC ending. So that was a metaphorical tie-in. And the third book is about a skyjacking, and he's reading science fiction. He's reading space pirates, so the space pirates are tied into skyjacking metaphorically.

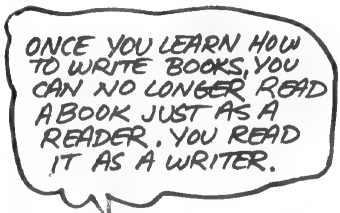
SANDERSON: So there's a certain pattern of disillusionment—that he has fantasties come true and they turn out to be rather unpleasant.

COLLINS: In terms of the books, that's true. In terms of my own tastes, something very strange happened with comics. One of the things that happens to any person who becomes involved with the arts is that you—hmm, how can I put this? I was going to say, "lose your cherry," which is perhaps not graceful.

SANDERSON: Become jaded?

COLLINS: "Jaded" is right, but it isn't precisely what I meant. Let me just describe it like a story. You fall in love with the arts. I might be the movies, or it might be theater, it might be mystery novels, it might be comics. In my case, it was a number of things, because I worked as a professional musician for a while, so I got into rock and roll on a professional basis. I've done some theater—there have been various areas of the arts I've done professionally. You get into one of those areas because you love it. You want to write books because you love to read books. But once you learn how to write books, you no longer can read a book as just a reader. You read it as a writer. You read it as a professional. And it is very difficult thereafter to check your brains out at the popcorn counter and go in and sit down and watch the movie. It's very difficult to do that because you *know* the techniques and there's also the aspect of it that it's your competition. You're checking your competition out. So, it has to be pretty goddamn good to grab you enough so that you can. I'm not saying that my perspective prevents me from being excited by some books or movies. *RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK* worked on me pretty darn good. Even though I was watching the technique, it was still so good, I was thrilled.

SANDERSON: Well, in a way, doesn't being a professional



and knowing the technique *increase* your appreciation of the real masters, like Eisner, Gould, Hammet, or Chandler?

COLLINS: It increases your appreciation of the masters. But it decreases your ability to have dumb fun with the genre or have dumb fun with whatever—movies, theater, whatever.

SANDERSON: Makes you less tolerant of what doesn't match the masters.

COLLINS: That's right. In the mystery area, I reread Spillane, Hammet, Chandler. I continue to read Donald E. Westlake, Ed McBain... Of the current people, I can't think of anyone but McBain and Westlake. There's a few others. Of the older people, James M. Cain is one of my heroes. There's an obscure writer named Jim Thompson who is perhaps best known for having written the book that Sam Peckinpah's movie *THE GETAWAY* was based upon...

SANDERSON: By the way, Dean Mullaney's got a copy of *MILDRED PIERCE*...

COLLINS: MILDRED PIERCE by James M. Cain—that's not one of my favorites by him, but Cain is absolutely one of my very favorites. I think he's right up there with Hammet and Mickey Spillane. I'm less hot on Chandler, although he is in my upper group; quite frankly, I'll tell you a little secret: one of the ways I judge other writers in the mystery area particularly is if they tell me their favorite mystery writer is Chandler, and they think Chandler's better than Hammett—to me, that's a key. This is just my personal bias; it doesn't mean anything, really. But, in point of fact, I believe that Hammet was *it*.

SANDERSON: Why is he better than Chandler?

COLLINS: Without putting on my college professor hat (I did teach college for six years—I'm not proud of it but I did it), I'll just say that Hammett is artistically superior. I find that Chandler uses twelve words and Hammett uses ten. Chandler wrote the same book over and over again—they always had the same characters; the crazy doctor, the gangster. There's a certain pattern there that is exactly the same. Chandler is a little bit self-consciously literary, is not really a tough guy. I do not really sense a tough man behind that prose. I do not believe Phillip Marlowe as a tough character. There are a number of other things in that area. I just think it's phony. I don't think it rings true, whereas Hammett was an ex-Pinkerton operative; the books are usually done in the third person. I shouldn't say that—three of his five novels are actually done in the first person. But even when it's in the first person, he has a much more objective style. In his five novels, he created everything. Every major kind of detective novel there is, in five novels, he created. In *RED HARVEST*, he invented the Mickey Spillane novel—of vengeance, basically. The tough guy avenger, the bodies-piling-up type of story. In *THE DAIN CURSE*, he invented the Chandler kind of novel, with the Ross MacDonald type of mystery with the elaborate solution hidden in the closets, skeletons hidden in the closets of a family's past, which is Chandler and Ross MacDonald. In *THE MALTESE FALCON*, Hammett invented the traditional private-eye novel, and wrote the best one of all time. In *THE GLASS KEY*, he wrote the crime novel in which the detective is an amoral non-detective. He actually is the bodyguard of a politician. So he did the detective novel where the guy is an amateur detective, but is hardly a beginner. He is very much a tough guy. While Hammett didn't invent that—that had been done before—he perfected it and set the standard for that kind of book. In the fifth book, he did *THE THIN MAN*, which is Nick and Nora Charles, the light comedy of manners being brought to the tough mystery story—yet it was still a tough mystery story.

SANDERSON: So what you're saying is that he invented all the different types of the American tough detective story, as contrasted with the English tradition—Doyle, and Poe...

COLLINS: Well, I've said some bad things about Chandler; now let me say some good things.

While I find he doesn't ring as true as Hammett, and while I find him a little pretentiously literary, Chandler's Philip Marlowe is a very charming character. The metaphors are terrific; there is a wonderful mood to those books, and they're often very witty, and I often have a great deal of fun reading them. He probably is still in my top ten favorite writers. Maybe the top five. I think very highly of him, and I only say the negative things about him to try to pull it into perspective. I do the opposite game with Spillane. Spillane has flaws, but Spillane is so underrated that when I discuss Spillane I dwell on what he did right. I could say the same things about Spillane; I could tell you exactly what's wrong with Spillane. But he is so mis-read and so under-rated...

SANDERSON: Do you think this is in part because Spillane is still alive and Chandler and Hammet are not?

COLLINS: Partially, and I'm noting now that Spillane is getting into his sixties, and having written a children's book recently, which attracted media attention, people are starting to look on him as a grand old man of the mystery novel. I'm glad to see that—I'm glad to see him getting some attention—but I find it incredible that it's at this late date. Mickey Spillane invented one of the great detectives of all time: Mike Hammer! There are only three great tough detective writers—*three*: Hammett, Chandler, and Spillane. Everybody else is an imitator. Thus far, I have been an imitator. I've got some things in mind that I hope will get me out of that area. The goal is always to do it better than *THE MALTESE FALCON*, if *anybody* can do that. It's a weird situation, where you have a guy coming in and in effect writing the first book in a genre, and doing the *best* one. Why wasn't he content just to invent the goddamn genre—why did he have to go and write the best one?

SANDERSON: I suppose in a sense that's like the English tradition, too, where in Doyle is still considered apparently better than any of his followers.

COLLINS: I agree with that. But I don't put Doyle on a literary level with Hammett. I put Hammet on a level with, say, F. Scott Fitzgerald. I think he is very high on the American literature list.

SANDERSON: So obviously you're not one of those who feel that the genre of fiction is always going to be limited—it can be art, whether it's in detective novels or comics, I suppose.

COLLINS: I haven't seen much, I must say, in the science fiction field that I consider to be on a level with the "tough guy" mystery. With the possible exception of Ray Bradbury. I'm talking modern here, because say Edgar Allen Poe straddles both mystery and fantasy.

SANDERSON: And Wells.

COLLINS: And Wells—Wells would be 20th century. If you want to talk 20th century, I do not think science fiction/fantasy has produced a Hammett, or a Chandler. I don't think they've even produced a Spillane. I mean, while I respect them as writers, I can't really take Isaac Asimov on one end and Harlan Ellison on the other end and think about them in terms of a Dashiell Hammett or an F. Scott Fitzgerald, and begin to take that seriously. I mean, it's just like to me, are you kidding? While at the

ROGER –
A SILENCED BULLET - FROM THE ROOFTOP ACROSS THE WAY, LIKELY- A RIFLE, NO DOUBT –
THE BULLET HAD GONE THROUGH ROGER'S – I WAS LUCKY I DIDN'T GET SLOPPY SECONDS –
ROGER WAS LUCKY, TOO – HE WAS STILL ALIVE –
AMBULANCE – GUNSHOT WOUND IN CHEST - BRADBURY BUILDING, BATTS THEN – HURRY!

same time I admire both of those people as craftsmen. And Ellison, at times, as a spokesman.

SANDERSON: What's the difference between being a craftsman and an artist? For example, when you're talking of contrasting Hammett and Chandler, you were talking about some things which struck me as more a matter of craft.

COLLINS: You know something? One of the problems may be that the artist is the craftsman who turns out art.

SANDERSON: That, when you get to a certain level of mastery of your craft, it *becomes* art?

COLLINS: Not necessarily; I think you can become a master of your craft and art will never happen. I think art is like—I think Chandler said this—I think he said art is like red hair. It just happens. But you have to have your craft.

Sometimes you have your art and the craft isn't there, like with primitive artists, like Henri Rousseau, Grandma Moses—that's art, but their craft is just not there.

SANDERSON: Well, then, where does art lie for your certain kind of insight into the human condition?

COLLINS: I think the Model story was art. I think Hammett and Chandler both were art. But where Hammett, maybe, had it over Chandler was that I think that Chandler was self-consciously *trying* to do art. He should've been doing craft, and because he was a genius, art would've just happened. While I do know that Hammett had certain pretensions toward art, I think that Hammett was basically a writer trying to make a living. He drew upon his life, he drew upon what he knew. And it all fit in, and he created art. I think one of the reasons why he stopped writing—he stopped writing in the early 1930s, and lived until the early 1960s—is that he started to get self-conscious, and he started to know that he was creating art or that he might be creating art or that he was afraid he might be creating art. I think he couldn't handle it. He was quoted once as saying—and I'm going to have to paraphrase it, because I don't know the exact quote—but he said something to the effect of, "When you know that you have a style, it's all over." What he's saying is that when you become self-conscious, and you know that people are seeing you as an artist, then you're in trouble, because you've *got* to concentrate on your craft. I mentioned Ellison before. I used to be a big fan of his. I got a little down on him more because of his public posture than of his work, but he was a guy that was really just hacking stories out for men's magazines and science fiction pulps. And he was a wordsmith: he was a craftsmen. And some of his stories *are* pulp. But art sometimes happens in some of them, or something close to it happens. He's written a couple of stories that I think may endure: "*I Have No Mouth but I Must Scream*," "*Repent, Harlequin, Said the Tick-TockMan*," there's a real good chance that those stories are going to get read for a long time. But I don't think he was trying to be an artist then. When he wrote those stories, I think he was a craftsman—it's very presumptuous of me to assume what Harlan Ellison was doing and I apologize—but I think he was trying to be a *writer*, not an artist. And I think he was trying to keep the electric lights on, the water running, and the furniture from being repossessed, which is what Hammett was doing. I don't know if you know this about Hammett, but he was tubercular and he was 50% disabled, and he really couldn't hold down regular jobs. He wrote because he *had* to get some money. (And he didn't make a hell of a lot of money; one of his better years, I think in the late 1920s, he made a thousand dollars. In the 1920s, a thousand dollars was more than it is now—but still, it wasn't a fortune.) It was only the fact that he had a pension for his 50% disability—because he'd been in the service—that he was able to struggle along. And the funny thing about Hammett is, when he started making money, he couldn't write anymore. He lived the majority of his years out on his "*Thin Man*" residuals, the fact that they were paying him $500 a week for the "*Thin Man*" radio show, which he didn't have anything to do with. And he *despised* the "*Thin Man*" characters.

SANDERSON: Even though they were supposedly based on himself and—

COLLINS: Lillian Hellman. Well, I think he came to despise them because of the "*Thin Man*" movie series, which he did write—at least I believe he wrote the first two sequels. He didn't write the screen plays, but he did write the screen stories, and they were very fully fleshed out. And so he did have to go back and write about those characters again, which he disliked doing. He hadn't done a real sequel since the Continental Op stories. He did hack out a couple "*Sam Spade*" short stories in his later career. I

HEAVY-SET GUY WAS BACKSTAGE—
THAT WOULD BE OWNLEY CHYLDE.
WHO?
A FAN OF SPARKLE'S—SHE TOLD HIM HE COULD STAY FOR THE SHOW.
A BABY-FACED CHARACTER?" TRACY ASKS. "I'VE NOTICED HIM AT SPARKLE'S SHOWS—"
WELL, I HAD CONCEIVED THE "OWNLEY CHYLDE" STORY PRIOR TO THE CHAPMAN INCIDENT. I CONSIDERED YANKING THE STORY, THEN I THOUGHT: "NO ITS OBVIOUSLY NOT GOING TO BE THE SAME AS CHAPMAN

think he came to hate those characters, and I think he was once quoted as saying something like, "There may be better writers, but there's nobody who's created a more insufferably smug pair of characters than Nick and Nora Charles, and I take a perverse pride in that. No one's come up with anything quite as obnoxious as them." That was a very self-deprecating remark.

SANDERSON: How do you deal with the fact that you're writing a strip that's had a fifty-year history? How do you keep the characters fresh?

COLLINS: Well, I have a great deal of respect for what Chet did; that's obvious. I feel very fortunate to have an artist who's worked on the strip for sixteen years, Rick Fletcher, as Gould's assistant. That helps give it a nice continuity right there. I really came into the catbird seat, and sat down. I really lucked into my situation.

On the other hand, there are certain pressures put upon me, simply because I'm following in the footsteps of Chester Gould. It's like, "Well, Conan Doyle is retiring now; would you like to write some *'Sherlock Holmes'* stories?" So that's a tough one.

I approach Tracy as modern-day. I try not to get carried away with the nostalgia, although I obviously have an affection for the history of the strip. I try to be consistent with what Chet did, try to maintain the traditions of the strip, and I put little touches in that the fans will get a kick out of, but I do not let nostalgia be the over-riding aspect of the strip.

SANDERSON: You make great emphasis on contemporary crimes.

COLLINS: Absolutely. We've gotten a lot of publicity for that. As you know, there was a skyjacking which was apparently, so the media claim, patterned on the skyjacking in the script. Not having learned my lesson, I went ahead and used the skyjacking in one of the *"Nolan"* books as well.

But I think it's really very important for Tracy to be dealing with modern-day crimes, computer crime and the art heist that we patterned upon the very famous art heist. We've done punk rock (which isn't a crime but might be in some people's eyes), and there's an inner-city arson case, which we did not too long ago. Then there was a corporate kidnapping story, which got us a write-up in *TIME*...

SANDERSON: And right now, you're doing what seems to be turning into a Mark David Chapman type of story.

COLLINS: By the time this interview appears, that will be over. This is one of the areas that is very strange about writing a syndicated strip. I am sixteen weeks ahead on the continuity, and I plan the stories about twenty weeks ahead. I have to do a fleshed-out synopsis of the story for two reasons: the syndicate has to see it to approve it, and with the exception of once, they've always given me the complete go-ahead; and the other reason is that the artist needs to have the synopsis ahead of time so he can start working on the villain, because the visual look, the visual aspect of the villain in the *DICK TRACY* strip is the key to the character. We pass drawings back and forth—I even do rough drawings sometimes. It often goes through a two or three-stage metamorphosis. So we need four or five weeks before the actual story begins.

Well, I had conceived the "Ownley Chylde" story prior to the Chapman incident, and I mean I saw echoes there—precognition or whatever the hell you want to call it. I considered yanking the story, then I thought, "No, it's obviously not going to be the same as Chapman." The similarity is this (and I may even have built a little more of this into the story after Chapman than I had originally intended): it seemed to me, looking at Chapman, that he was a guy who apparently idolized Lennon, and idolized the Beatles. He was a Beatles fan, as many of us were, as I was; a very good friend of mine, who had some mental problems, who could have been Chapman, and was in rock and roll bands with me, wanted to be Lennon, and identified with him that much. It occurred to me that Chapman was a Lennon collector. He collected everything that had to do with John Lennon. And finally there was only one thing left to do: collect Lennon. And he collected his life.

Well what I did with Ownley Chylde—and again, I had the basic story prior to Chapman—but again, I did say, "Okay, we'll have a Sparkle Plenty collector." He's got the dolls, and he's got the games, and he's got the toys, he's got the comic books, and what is there left for him to collect but Sparkle Plenty? Now, he is not going to kill Sparkle Plenty; he wants to marry her, but he doesn't care if she wants to marry him or not, which is the rub. So, I guess I am trying to point out, as a collector myself, I am aware that at the root of collecting, there is an unhealthy, even

sick nature that we all have.

SANDERSON: So there's a little bit of your being disturbed by certain kinds of fans.

COLLINS: And myself. I'm an only child—*not* spelled O-W-N-L-E-Y. I'm an only child. I was spoiled, as all only children are. I am very materialistic, yet I'm aware of it, so that helps. I thought "Ownley Chylde" as in Own, as in every only child—even though it's spelled "only"—and all of us collectors who must *have*, you know? It's sick. It's unnatural.

SANDERSON: If you don't have a real life to compensate...

COLLINS: That's right. And I don't want to make a big, neurotic deal about it. But I'm just saying, "Look, folks, it came to that: Ownley collected Sparkle; Chapman collected Lennon." And collecting does get out of hand. And the funny thing is, a lot of the collectors at the convention who've come up to me are really getting a kick out of the character. I'm hoping they're all picking up on the fact that I'm having a little fun with collecting; that the little creep has a room full of this and a room full of that, and *do* see the logical end to all of this: the logical end to collecting is having Neal Adams locked in your closet, drawing pictures for you.

SANDERSON: You haven't seen...what I produce for Christmasses—instead of Christmas cards for my friends, I write up a radio-style play, with real-life people as comics characters, and currently I have an Eisner parody villainess, named Pristine Mint (Collins laughs), who last Christmas went around collecting many comic book writers and artists. But her plan is to lock them in a vault, and they'll turn out comics for her personally, and she'll never read them; she just collects them.

COLLINS: I just thought of something! This is not an original idea of mine; this is just the first I've thought of this since I did the story, but it just occurs to me that there's a famous Robert Bloch story about a man who collected Edgar Allen Poe, and who actually has Edgar Allen Poe in his basement, turning out new stuff.

SANDERSON: Well, there's the collector too.

COLLINS: Yes. Sure. It's not a new idea. But it's a new use of an old idea, which is to expand on the comic book-pop culture collector, and Chapman of course is the real life example.

And I don't even like to use his name, because one of the things I promised myself was that I was going to forget this guy's name. It drives me crazy when I see it in the headlines. I don't want to distinguish this guy. I don't want to think that every time John Lennon is mentioned, he's going to get mentioned too, because that's what he wanted. I wouldn't give him what he wanted. But Chapman is the real-life extension of that. And that's the last time I'll use his name in this interview.

SANDERSON: Okay. So here you've done the "*Ownley Chylde*" thing, which is the dark side of the collector. Why did you decide to put Jon, the comics collector, into the "*Nolan*" books? And is there a reason why he continually undergoes these disillusionments?

COLLINS: There's a couple reasons that Jon is in there.

BAIT MONEY, the first "*Nolan*" book, was written as a one-shot, it was written when I was in college in 1969, and it occurred to me, one of the reasons why I wasn't selling my books—I started writing mystery books in the ninth grade, and my parents were very good to me; they underwrote me to the degree that they didn't make me go out and get a job in the Summer—they let me stay home and write a book in the Summer. I'd spend the school year trying to market it, and it would come back from five or six publishers and I realized it was not going to sell. I repeated this process all the way through high school, and into college, for a total of six or seven of these unpublished novels. On the seventh one, I came pretty close. I got a very nice letter from the editor at Gold Medal, but the editor pointed out to me that I was doing something that was very common with writers who come out of a fan mentality—I was writing books that came out of books.

There's a famous story that I've heard, and I don't know if it's apocryphal or not, about Harlan Ellison and Sir Cyril Kornbluth. Ellison at this point was just getting started, and resented the fact that these old-guard people were treating him like a punk. (At the same time, he was coming on as a punk, and getting off on it.) And quite frankly, Ellison did a lot of work that was of first-rate quality, and he deserved more respect than he was getting. But what Kornbluth said to him, and I want to say right here that I don't necessarily think this applies to Ellison, but it certainly applies to a lot of us, and it certainly applies to a lot of my unpublished books, "You know, Mr. Ellison, a real writer sits down at his typewriter, and he takes his life which he has lived, for good or for ill, exciting or boring, and he turns it into fiction. His stories are once removed from reality. You, Mr. Ellison, read that man's stories and sit down at your typewriter and make up stories that come out of what you've read, which makes your stories twice removed from reality, and that is why you'll never be any damn good."

I think really what's wrong with a lot of genre writing is that it comes out of other genre writing. It's someone imitating George Perez, and this person's never heard of Jack Kirby.

I was doing that. I was reading Mickey Spillane, Chandler, all these people, and my stuff was coming directly out of there. Now, with *BAIT MONEY* I was coming very much out of Richard Stark. (Richard Stark is a pen-name for Donald E. Westlake.) But what I also did in that book was draw from my own life. I wrote about my own area. *Every* place in those books is someplace I have been. Any building is a building I have been in. Any room is a room I have been in. The bank that is robbed in that book is the bank where my wife worked—she and I worked out a real robbery. Jon reflected my interest in comic books and gave me a point-of-view character. So while perhaps 50% of it was coming from Richard Stark, I was with the rest taking my life—for good or for ill, exciting or boring—and I was turning it into fiction. That was why I used Jon.

Now, that book was not intended as a series book. In the original version of that book, Nolan died. He died in the gutter, actually. And I was given some advice on that. First of all, the editors said, "We want you to do more *'Nolan'* books." Fine. I'm the first one to sell out if somebody's buying (laughs), and also, I had been disturbed by something, and that is that when I decided to do the book, I conceived that it would be a tough guy's last stand. It was going to be the death of the classic American tough guy. But what often happens in a book is that things develop which you didn't plan. And the Batman and Robin, father and son relationship which development between Nolan and Jon became such that it really didn't make sense that Jon would leave Nolan behind. By hook or by crook, Jon would come back. This editor convinced me of this, and when an editor's right, an editor's right. I mean, they are right sometimes. I said, "You're right; that *is* a little more

honest than my ending."

SANDERSON: And, in a sense, Jon does become a hero, the type he read about, at the end.

COLLINS: Yes. He does.

I think the book is a nifty little book. I don't think it's the greatest thing ever written. I don't think it's art. But I think it's a hell of a book for a guy to have written his senior year in college. I'm proud of it.

When I had to do the other books, they came to me and said, "We want you to do more *'Nolan'* books." I thought about it; I was troubled about it for a couple reasons. For one thing, Nolan is a very interesting character when he's bumped up against other characters. But he is pretty much a standard tough guy figure by himself, though, I think as the series progresses he become more real. But, at least in *BAIT MONEY* he was a prototype, not a stereotype—he was some kind of "type," anyway. He also was based very much on Richard Stark's character, Parker. And while it was okay to do a one-shot and have it published and have it be similar to books by Richard Stark as part of a pattern of my growth as a writer, doing it as a *series*—that disturbed me. But Westlake's a friend of mine, and I actually asked his permission. "Can I do a *'Nolan'* series? Read this. Do you feel ripped off? Do you feel plagiarized?" And he said, "No, *'Nolan'* is different from Parker, Jon is very different, and the relationship they have is more human than anything I ever did in the Parker books," which I thought was a terrific thing to have him say. It dawned on me. Nolan and Jon. Not just Nolan. And I told the editor, "I'll do more *'Nolan's*, if you let me make it Nolan and Jon. You don't have to put *'Nolan and Jon'* on the cover, but Jon's going to be in all the books, or I don't think it will work." So that's why Jon stuck around. And one of the nice things is that Jon gets to do something that series character don't usually get to do. And that is, he gets to grow; he gets to change. That's one of the frustrating things about a series: people like the familiarity of a series character. But what really happens in a drama is that at the end of a drama, a character changes, learns something, grows in some way, or fails to grow and we are unhappy about it. The drama, for it to be a drama, has to have a conflict and it has to end up someplace with that character put through something. The series concept doesn't want its character to change. Tarzan always has to be Tarzan. Nolan can always be Nolan. But Jon gets to grow. And that's what I think makes the series work.

SANDERSON: And even Nolan is changing. He's becoming more friendly towards Jon, more gentle towards his women.

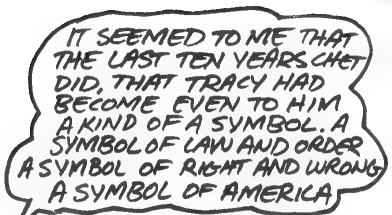
COLLINS: Yes. He is. And it's gradual, and it's enough that I don't think will bother anybody. But Nolan is intact as a concept I think you would admit.

SANDERSON: Yes.

COLLINS: As I think you may know, I wrote most of these book in the early 1970s, and due to a contractual foul-up, the middle three got tied up until about two years ago. And I went out and resold them and rewrote them, and revised them so they're new and old books at the same time. But I came back in late 1980 and had to write a new *"Nolan"* book—the last one had been written in 1974. Six years in between. Boy, did Jon change—because I had changed so much, and he was the "me" character. He had lost his innocence almost *completely*. And I don't know if that's because I had become cynical and disillusioned myself. But one of the things I had to do to be able to handle the six-year gap between the books was—in the continuity of the stories between books five and six, a year passes. And Nolan and Jon also don't see each other for about six months. There's no way that a reader would not pick up the fact that, between books five and six, these characters had gone through something.

SANDERSON: Now, back to how you keep Tracy fresh. There is the aging problem, for example. How old do you conceive Tracy as being? For instance, you have him and Tess have a child, as if to restore people's idea that he is not grandfatherly.

COLLINS: Well, in the strip this year—in fact, probably by the time this interview runs—Tracy celebrates his literal 50th birthday. There are two anniversaries in *TRACY*; there are two birthdays in *TRACY*. There is October 4th,


IT SEEMED TO ME THAT THE LAST TEN YEARS CHET DID, THAT TRACY HAD BECOME EVEN TO HIM A KIND OF A SYMBOL. A SYMBOL OF LAW AND ORDER A SYMBOL OF RIGHT AND WRONG A SYMBOL OF AMERICA

which is the anniversary of the Sunday page; then, there is October 12th, which is the anniversary of the daily page. (The dailies were where the story would run. On Sundays, the stories they'd run were self-contained stories, single tabloid page stories that preceded Tracy's actual involvement on the police force.) So I celebrated both days. I had a special Sunday page, which reprised almost the entire fifty years of the strip in one page; then, on October 12th, Tracy had a birthday party, and they brought him a cake with candles and the whole works, and he becomes literally fifty years old. He will probably remain fifty years old from here on out. I think that's old enough, and we'll keep him ageless.

SANDERSON: Will other characters age? Or will they all be frozen in place?

COLLINS: They will age at whatever rate I think suits the story best, I guess without any regard to actual logic.

SANDERSON: For example, Sparkle Plenty now has the chronological age of thirty-four.

COLLINS: But, incidentally, she probably will not get any older. I did that for a couple reasons.

One thing—first, let me say that Tracy ages—now that he's fifty, he'll stop aging but until now I considered him aging, basically one year for our two. When the strip started he was twenty-or twenty-five, and fifty literal years have passed, and only twenty-five years have passed. That's my justification in my mind. The only reason I was literal with Sparkle's age—in terms of the strip, it probably would have been better for her to be twenty-four, or twenty-five, than thirty-four...

SANDERSON: She looks younger.

COLLINS: But because Gould, in the early days of Sparkle's involvement with the strip—Sparkle was a very popular character in the strip; remember the Sparkle Plenty dolls (this is, of course, pre-Snoopy and Charles Schulz, but prior to that, the Sparkle Plenty doll was the number-one comic strip related toy in history). So, for the first five or even ten years of her life, I'm not quite sure how long he kept it up—but Gould actually did celebrate Sparkle Plenty's birthday in the strip. He would slow the action down and say, "Excuse me folks, we're going to interrupt the action today, because it's Sparkle Plenty's birthday." She would be eight years old, and there would be a cake, and there would be Gravel Gertie, and there would be B.O. Plenty, and because he had done that a number of times, when I put Sparkle in this life-or-death situation, and it was coming close to her actual birthday, I thought, "Why not do the literal birthday?" Just a kind of nostalgia footnote. We could go back to 1947 and have a picture showing her as the long-haired baby being slapped by the doctor. And I think it was a sweet idea—I really do.

SANDERSON: How do you go about humanizing Tracy?

COLLINS: By bringing family into it and by showing some human frailties.

It seemed to me that the last ten years Chet did, that Tracy had become even to him a kind of a symbol. A symbol of law and order, a symbol of right and wrong, a symbol of America—he was all of these things. He was an icon. And part of that is built into the design of the character, after all, this guy's face is like a ship's prow. Metaphorically, that's nice, because that razor-sharp profile cuts right through the essence and gets to the solution in time.

SANDERSON: Just like Batman. Just like Gould also invented the Penguin's appearance.

COLLINS: Who was the Penguin?

SANDERSON: He was in the 1930s *"Tommyguns"* book.

COLLINS: Oh, sure. I never thought of that.

SANDERSON: It's mentioned in the introduction.

COLLINS: I hadn't made that connection, or if I had, it had slipped my mind.

And I think the symbolism is natural. Gould had put the family life of the detective in the background, and the symbology of *TRACY* had come in the forefront. Gould stressed the law and order side, and I'm not talking just of police science here, but I'm talking about almost a political law-and-order aspect. And that was in the 1960s and early 1970s, when cops were being called pigs, and the anti-war movement was happening, and riots and so on, and Gould wanted to come out fully and squarely behind the police. To me, that was dangerous for a couple of reasons. One, you're getting into a political area where you don't really want Tracy identified with the police in that political sense. The other aspect that bothered me was that Tracy became less of a character. The more of a symbol he is, the less of a character he is. And that was the reason I brought thing in like the family life, the child. Even in the first story, I had him be kidnapped, and stuck down in the old deathtrap that Flattop had been trapped in years before, brought in a revenge story, to get some emotion into it.

SANDERSON: And you also had him going to Vitamin Flintheart's dinner theater, apparently having a good time, and going to a country-and-western bar, and places like

that.

COLLINS: Right. Yeah. There's a nice little gag, there, I think, where he's wearing kind of a country-western outfit, and he says he feels foolish in that outfit, and Tess says, "Well, dear. You can't always wear a black suit."

SANDERSON: But his ability to laugh at himself, like when the stewardess recognized him when he got on that plane, and he got all embarrassed, because he felt so grandfatherly—she said she had been reading about him since she was a child.

COLLINS: That's right. And also, he said to her, "Why aren't you more thorough—don't you know that I could be a skyjacker?" She says, "Don't be ridiculous, I've known about you since I was a kid—you're Dick Tracy!" And he expressed chagrin not only because that made him feel grandfatherly, but his effectiveness as a detective is slightly hampered by the fact that everybody recognizes him! It was almost a reference to that classic Gahan Wilson cartoon, of Dick Tracy being beaten up by the thugs, because he's tried to go undercover. The idea that Tracy could go undercover with that face is just a little too ridiculous.

SANDERSON: It seems to me that you've given a lot of warmth to the continuing characters, the good characters...

COLLINS: I'm glad you feel that way.

SANDERSON: Tracy, Tess, Junior—they have real feeling for each other. You seem very fond of Flinthead and the Plentys, and Liz and Sam—it's this huge extended family.

COLLINS: That's right.

SANDERSON: Instead of just this team of crimefighters and their eccentric friends.

COLLINS: Right. And I brought in a few others. I brought in a character called Johnny Adonis, who is a young undercover cop who was originally in the art heist case...

SANDERSON: And Lee Ebony, whose last name I take to be significant...

COLLINS: Yes, it's a tribute of course, to *EBONY* magazine. (Laughs)

SANDERSON: Oh, yes.

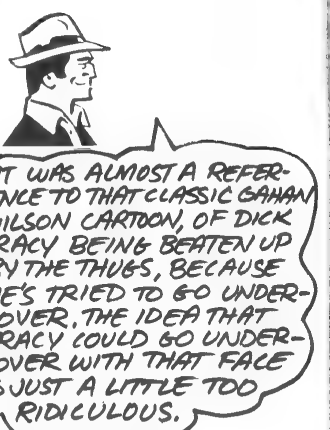
COLLINS: I think we all know that that's a tribute to Ebony in *"THE SPIRIT."* And that tribute comes—although I thought it up, the tribute is shared, because Fletcher is a big *"SPIRIT"*/Eisner fan. Eisner is one of his two or three favorites.

SANDERSON: Was Willie Wheeler also modeled after Ebony?

COLLINS: Not really. Not really at all. In fact, one of the problems with the size of the extended family is that I like all these characters, but there's only so much room for them. Now that I've come up with this major crime squad, which is Tracy and Sam, and Lizz, and Lee Ebony, and Adonis—with the limited space that we have, if I want to show a briefing with all five characters in one panel, it's very cramped. So it's very rare that everybody is there at the same time. I haven't begun yet to explore Lee Ebony and Johnny Adonis. I have things in mind for them both, and have not really had the space to do it. By the time this interview appears, I may have done somethings in that regard. Because I am intended to have Lizz disappear from the scene for awhile. That will enable some of the other characters to come to the forefront, and for us to get to know them a little bit better.

SANDERSON: To what extent does Gould still advise is the strip?

COLLINS: I talk to him once or twice a month on the phone; we're friends, and he's a very gracious man, and


IT WAS ALMOST A REFERENCE TO THAT CLASSIC GAHAN WILSON CARTOON, OF DICK TRACY BEING BEATEN UP BY THE THUGS, BECAUSE HE'S TRIED TO GO UNDERCOVER. THE IDEA THAT TRACY COULD GO UNDERCOVER WITH THAT FACE IS JUST A LITTLE TOO RIDICULOUS.

very helpful to me. He likes to consider himself completely retired. If a reporter will ask him, he'll say he has nothing to do with the strip. In point of fact, he is still a consultant on the strip. But he is not active in developing plots, he has no veto power over what I do. But it's not unusual for me to get a phone call from him, maybe complaining about something, and suggesting that I do it another way, or call me up liking something—and both of these things happen. And, if I haven't heard from him, I make *sure* we touch bases at least once a month.

SANDERSON: Would you like to give examples of any suggestion that he's made?

COLLINS: It's nothing major. I know when we got the violence criticism from Harrisburg, Penn., they dropped the strip—although apparently someone else in their neighborhood has picked it up—but I was very vocal in defending the strip, and there were several wire-service interviews with me, and I did interviews all over the country on the radio, defending the strip from what I though was a near-libelous attack that was made upon us by that editor in Harrisburg, in which any number of inaccurate accusations had been made against the strip. Scenes were described such as someone being shot through the head, which has not happened. I've been doing the strip for four years, and that has not happened. It was very much an off-the-wall kind of accusation.

But one thing Gould did suggest, he did say "You're playing the guns up too much. The guns, maybe, are being drawn too large." That was one of the things he said.

Another time, recently, we talked about this feeling that I didn't have enough law and order and police science in the strip. It is true that I do not emphasize that as much as he did. But he had a point, and because of that I worked some crime prevention material in.

Dick Tracy's ROGUES' GALLERY
CHESTER GOULD —CREATED DICK TRACY IN 1931; SERVED 46 YEARS— PAROLED 1977. ACCOMPLICES FLETCHER and COLLINS, STILL AT LARGE.

SANDERSON: Is this [at] the end of the arsonist story?

COLLINS: No. The arsonist story was very much a kind of crime prevention story, but in the B.U. Tiffil/Pushy continuity there was very little very hard-core police work, and I felt he thought that story may have been a little too much of a soap opera. Even though, ironically, that's the story on which we got into trouble over the supposed violence. So it just shows you really can't win. But he did call me and ask about the possibility of my working in a little more police science and law and order material into the strip. He thought I had been a little slack on that recently. And in fact, I told him that I was already planning to work some crime prevention in, and had already contacted the Department of Justice, who put me in touch with the "Take a Bite Out of Crime" program. A bunch of the "Take a Bite out of Crime" material is going to appear in various strips, which again may have appeared by the time this interview appears. I believe the material will take place around August or September.

SANDERSON: Now, you are also planning to work Gould himself in as a character this year, under his own name? I understand that you were once a villain in the strip.

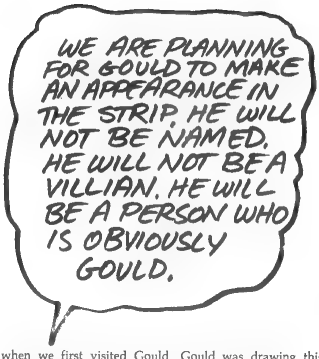
COLLINS: Oh, these are exaggerations. We are planning for Gould to make an appearance in the strip; he will not be named. He will not be a villain. He will be a person who is obviously Gould. Gould is also going to be in the Rogue's Gallery, which is a feature that isn't in all the papers. It's in the top row, which is dropped when people want a third of a page or a quarter-page format. So the only people who see this are those who see it in the half-page format. In the half-page format, Chester Gould is in the Rogue's Gallery. That is the 50th anniversary page. So he's the villain, I guess. (Laughs) As I remember the copy, it says something like, "Chester Gould served 46 years. Paroled 1977. Accomplices Fletcher and Collins, still at large."

SANDERSON: I see. So he *will* be named?

COLLINS: He *will* be named there. That is a realistic drawing or a more realistic caricature. I can't tell you about his use as a *character,* because that would give something away about the story. But he will be making an appearance in the story. His name will not be used, but anybody who knows him will recognize him.

SANDERSON: Is it true that you were once in the strip?

COLLINS: My friend Matt Masterson, and I—Masterson is the foremost *DICK TRACY* expert in the country—he lives in Boston, and it's real awkward for one of my best friends to live in Boston while I live in Muscatine, Iowa, but we still manage to see each other once or twice a year, and talk on the phone, to the phone company's great delight, several times a week. He and I used to visit Gould quite regularly, and we still do every once in a while, and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when we first visited Gould, Gould was drawing this character called "Bulky," and I had long hair and a mustache at the time and so did Bulky. This was the second time we had seen Gould, and Matt accused him of having drawn me into the strip. He just laughed. He never denied it or affirmed it. And later, when Matt wrote an article on all of the villains, for an extended Rogue's Gallery that appeared in the Museum of Cartoon Art's catalogue for their Gould show...Yeah. And, of course he said, "Bulky was patterned on Max Allan Collins." I think he said Leydon Egg was patterned on himself—Leydon Egg was bald. Matt is a little short in the hair department. And we never have gotten Gould to affirm or deny either one of those. I think Matt figured if he put into print, it would become true, and it's followed me wherever I've gone, and people assume I'm going to be this big fat guy, and I hope I'm not.

SANDERSON: What is it that goes to make a great Tracy villain?

COLLINS: Well, I can only speak for the ones I've worked on—whether they're great or not is up to the readers. But what I try to do is—I try to begin with a subject matter, as opposed to beginning with a villain. I begin with a subject matter, and then metaphorically let the villain reflect the subject matter. Plus, I make sure that the villain's name, of course, in some way metaphorically reflects the villain's personality—perhaps his personal appearance, or whatever. So that Breakdown is a guy who has little nervous breakdowns all the time.

SANDERSON: I think after that comes the cloning of Mumbles.

COLLINS: You liked the cloning of Mumbles? I kind of liked that story, too, and that's just the kind of outrageous thing I like to do that is just close enough to reality that you don't throw it out the window, but just nutty enough that you might get a smile out of it.

SANDERSON: But anyway. On to Breakdown.

COLLINS: Breakdown is an example of a kind of villain where the name is somehow metaphorically reflective of the character's appearance. In this case it's both, because Breakdown is this big, tough, strong guy who, when he gets in a stress situation, breaks down. And whereas in one

panel, his suit has been immaculate, with its stripes, and his hair has been combed back, he begins to shake and tremble, and says, "I can't cope, I can't cope," and the stripes in the suit become jagged lines. His hair is suddenly a mess. And then one of his boys behind him pats him on the back and says, "It'll be okay, boss," and then the next panels, through comic strip magic, he is perfectly immaculate, his hair is back, his suit is pressed again, and he's saying, "Shut up!" And as he's combing his hair back, immaculately in place, the guys are ducking, as if he's going to hit them. Therefore, both the appearance and his personality are tied in, in one nice little package there. And Torcher came about when I had the idea for the arson story—that terrific pun occurred to me. And I also had done a bunch of kind of cute villains that I kind of had a good time with—I had done Art Dekko and Sue Reel—who were probably the most popular continuity we've done—lot of response on that. And several that were basically tongue-in-cheek and comical. And I thought, "It's time to do an old-fashioned Gould villain, who is really vile. Who is not funny." Breakdown was—

SANDERSON: He was sort of humorous.

COLLINS: He was sort of humorous. Because it was a gag. It was a gag concept.

SANDERSON: When he had his breakdowns, it was funny—not that what he was doing was funny...

COLLINS: Not what he was doing, but it *was* kind of tongue-in-cheek approach. But Torcher—I wanted to do a really evil man. Because I wanted to kill one. I wanted to kill one like Gould used to do with his villains. I thought it was time to do something traditional. And I wanted him to die by fire. He died in a fiery car crash—offstage, for those of you in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania—I do not show any charred body; I do not show any burnt body on a morgue slab, with a tag tied to its toe as Chet would have done (and as I would have liked to have done if I had my druthers, but knowing what the restrictions are today, I handled it offstage and I thought it was still pretty effective).

And Torcher's appearance—of course, his hair was red, and it was like a sea of flames, and at the same time it might have suggested the devil's horns. And he looked, I thought, like a cross between Satan and a dragon. It's personally my favorite villain that Fletcher has designed. He did work from ideas of mine; I sent him photographs of the actor Robert Lansing, and Dan Duryea, a couple other things, and gave him the idea—devil, dragon, and so on. The design of that character was all Rick's though.

SANDERSON: Do you and Fletcher often work that way, coming up with real live models for characters?

COLLINS: I have done that quite often. The real-life model for Breakdown was William Smith, the massive actor who played Falconetti on *RICH MAN, POOR MAN*. I think he's a great villain; he was in *EVERY WHICH WAY BUT LOOSE* also. Hmm, no, he wasn't. Actually, he was in the sequel, *EVERY WHICH WAY YOU CAN*, which I did not see, but I saw him in the previews.

SANDERSON: Now I've got the face.

COLLINS: I will send Rick photos; I will send him sketches—I sent him sketches of Bony and Claudine, for example. I sent him sketches on Memory and Data Banks and on Z. Z. Rowe for the computer-killer story. I sent him sketches on a number of them. On Ownley Chylde I sent him some sketches, so it's either photographs or sketches; occasionally, it's just a written description. It usually goes through a metamorphosis, of maybe two or three versions.

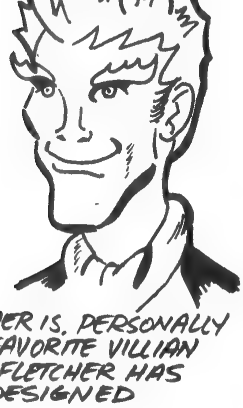
Ownley Chylde was tough, because Ownley Chylde had to look like a baby and sinister at the same time. That was a little tricky. I *think* we got it. I feel Ownley Chylde is pretty close, but maybe no everything I want him to be. Breakdwon was pretty close. On the other hand, Torcher was perfect—that was 100%. That was the goal for me—that's what I hope to achieve every time.

SANDERSON: How about bringing back the old villains? Sometimes you have, as with Mumbles; and other times, you have brought back the children of the villains—Angeltop and Brow, Jr., and sometimes you've done a villain that reminds Tracy of another villain. Once you did Quiver, who reminded him of Shaky.

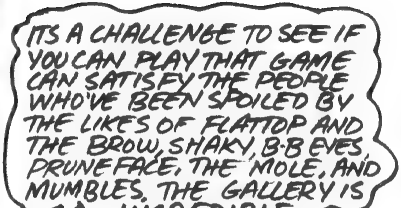
COLLINS: Right. And she might have been Shaky's daughter. We don't know. And maybe she'll be back some day and we'll reveal that, one way or another. That's hard to say. She did not die. She was just hauled off to the hoosegow.

SANDERSON: But how do you decide when you're going to bring back an old villain, and when you're going to bring back a new version, like Angeltop?

COLLINS: Well, you know, that's one of the things that Chet advised me on; initially, my plan was to do one Gould villain a year, and the rest of them be original. I get to do three to four stories a year. I did Angeltop first, and although that was my creation, oftentimes people tend to write that off, because she was Flattop's daughter. But I take full credit for that—that was a new villain, as far as I'm concerned. So I didn't really count that as a Gould villain; that's Collins and Fletcher. And then I followed up with Haf-and-Haf, who was a Gould villain, and I did that



TORCHER IS, PERSONALLY MY FAVORITE VILLIAN THAT FLETCHER HAS DESIGNED


ITS A CHALLENGE TO SEE IF YOU CAN PLAY THAT GAME CAN SATISFY THE PEOPLE WHO'VE BEEN SPOILED BY THE LIKES OF FLATTOP AND THE BROW, SHAKY, B-B EYES, PRUNEFACE, THE MOLE, AND MUMBLES. THE GALLERY IS INCREDIBLE

right away to indicate to people that I could handle a Gould villain. And then I did a long story that was a two-part story, that had to do with Big Boy...

SANDERSON: The very first one.

COLLINS: The very first villain; I was, in effect, ending the first *DICK TRACY* story. And in that story, there were several new villains introduced. There was a two-part story, and Big Boy was not really the villain; he was the envelope around the story. In fact, one of I think our strongest villains, the Iceman, was one of the two villains.

And that was one of the few times I ever got criticism from Gould, and he was saying, "You're doing the old villains too much." He didn't bring villains back very often, and he didn't approve of my doing that—he wanted me to do my own stuff.

SANDERSON: It's very few that he brought back. He brought back Mumbles, and...

COLLINS: Flattop, Jr.

SANDERSON: Flattop, Jr.

COLLINS: Stooge Viller was brought back several times. The Mole came back. But very infrequently over 47 years. When you look at *"Batman,"* which brought back more of its villains...

SANDERSON: ...again and again and again.

COLLINS: Yeah.

So I got that from Gould, and I got a surprising amount of mail from fans—I'm talking not just about the normal people write the letters, but I mean the hard-core comic book, comic strip fans—who surprisingly didn't approve of my doing the old villains. That surprised me. They always were supportive letters, but saying, "What's wrong with you—can't you do your own villains?" And that was like throwing the gauntlet down. And so, since then, with the exception of Mumbles, I've tried to concentrate primarily on my own villains. And even in Mumbles, I brought in secondary villains, who were original creations.

SANDERSON: Although you are bringing back a lot of the villains, you say, near the end of the year?

COLLINS: Well, that's a special occasion, and the fiftieth anniversary of the strip, that's a party. We have to check up on everybody. I think that's appropriate. And the actual villain of the piece I cannot reveal, because it's a surprise.

SANDERSON: Oh, *please* don't. I don't want to ruin the ending.

COLLINS: It's a surprise. But the actual villain who comes back to do the dirty work is not necessarily a Gould villain. So there may be some surprises down the road there.

So, while I've used a certain number of Gould villains, and I also have a great deal of respect for Gould's work, I have taken his advice. Since I only get to do three or four

stories a year, I have been inventing my villains for the most part, and will continue to do that.

SANDERSON: Although you're not ruling out using major Gould villains if the occasion demands?

COLLINS: No. Not at all. But I enjoy creating my own. It's more fun. It's a challenge to see if you can play that game, can satisfy the people who've been spoiled by the likes of Flattop and the Brow, Shaky, B-B Eyes, Pruneface, and the Mole, and Mumbles—the Gallery is incredible. The imagination of that man was incredible. To be able to satisfactorily fill those shoes is very satisfying.

SANDERSON: With regard to the cloning of Mumbles, to what extent do you feel science fiction has a role in *TRACY*? You got rid of Moon Maid...

COLLINS: Right. Science fiction has a certain place in *TRACY*—the gadgetry that's appropriate, the two-way wrist TV; as you know, with the cloning story, the cloning turned out to be a hoax. But I left a very strong feeling that if this man—Dr. Zy Ghote were allowed or funded to pursue his research, he probably would come up with cloning. We're doing fusion in the strip...

SANDERSON: But, of course, that's real.

COLLINS: It's *real*, but the breakthroughs that have been made in the strip have not been made in reality yet.

SANDERSON: And, of course, it's the same thing with cloning. It's real; it's just that they can only do it with frogs and things.

COLLINS: That's right. So I'm willing to take the extra one step, and one step is enough. It was enough for Neil Armstrong; it's enough for me.

SANDERSON: And how did the decision come about to get rid of the other moon paraphernalia?

COLLINS: That was part of my general outline to the syndicate when I made my proposal to them. When I tried out for the strip, I submitted a synopsis, which was the first story—it was the Angeltop story—and I also sat down and reread the last six years of Sunday pages, which I had in my collection. And I wrote about a ten-page critique of the direction of the strip in the last six years. I really looked at what had been going on lately with the strip, so that I

could say what I thought was right and what I thought was wrong, what I could continue, what I would discontinue. What characters were going to go, and what characters were going to come back. Just as Moon Maid and Vera Alldid exited, I brought back the 1950 character—actually, he goes back to 1944—Vitmin Flintheart. He had not been in the strip since 1950. And he's a great, great character, and I have a lot of fun with him.

So I also brought back Jim Trailer, who was an FBI man who had been in the strip in the 1930s, and I think hadn't been in the strip since the early war years. I did that for no special reason; just because Tracy needed an FBI liaison, and I thought, "Why not use Jim Trailer?"

SANDERSON: You brought back Tess for more than Christmas appearances...

COLLINS: That's right. I think I brought a certain humanity to the strip. But also I'm bringing a Gould approach to the strip. I'm not brining the approach Gould brought to it the last ten years; I'm bringing, I think, the approach he brought to it in the 1950s. That's what I like to think I'm doing.

Then again, this isn't to say that the approach he used in the 1960s or 1970s was a bad one. It's just that I knew what period of the strip appealed to me most, which is the 1950s. And that was the approach that I felt most comfortable with. Now, the 1950s is not usually considered to be as good as the 1940s. So I'm being quirky here. I'm being—maybe even eccentric about the approach I'm taking. But I happen to feel that the real golden age of the strip for *me* (even though everyone else perceives it as around 1941 through about 1946-47) is 1950 through 1956. Starting around Wormy and Blowtop and ending up around Flattop, Jr. The Flattop, Jr., story was just the most imaginative, surrealistic work of genius.

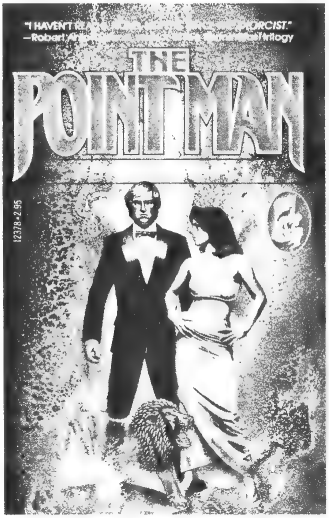
SANDERSON: I'm afraid I've never even seen any of the 1950s stuff. I've seen the 1930s stuff, but since I started reading Tracy in the 1960s, but I've never seen any 1950s stuff.

COLLINS: It's amazing. And there's very little of it that's been reprinted. There are some plans afoot to possibly reprint some of this stuff, and I hope to be involved in that, serving as an editor and writing introductions and selecting which years get reprinted. There are several plans to completely reprint the run of Gould—and maybe even continue on up through our work as well—in volumes that contain two or three complete years of the strip. If that project goes through, it can open the door for the kind of reprinting of all *kinds* of classic strips. I'm hoping that the acceptance for example, of the EC library, as published by Russ Cochran, can be passed on over to hardcover or softcover books reprinting classic comic strips in complete one-year or two-year runs. This stuff has been inaccessible for far too long. ●

Next Issue
Interviews:
George Perez
Kurt Schaffenberger
The Art of Wally Wood

From The Man Who Delivered
THE BATMAN
DOCTOR STRANGE
CAPTAIN AMERICA
SHANG-CHI
STAR-LORD

STEPHEN ENGLEHART



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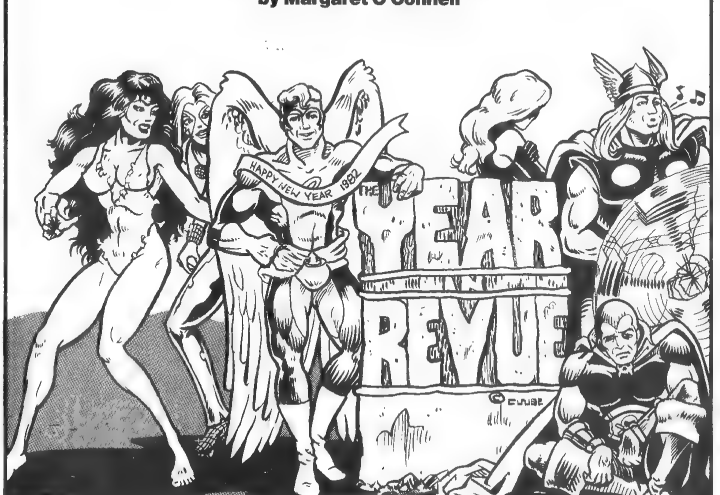
Totally Irrelevant Asides

by Margaret O'Connell



Year in Review 1981 Year in Review 1981

1981 was the year of bored super-villains and attempted rape. It was also the year of dreams coming true, comics creators paying homage to Will Eisner, and overbearing parents trying to dictate every detail of their offspring's future lives and careers.

First, boredom. The Spring and Summer of 1981 saw an unprecedented outbreak of *ennui* among super-villains of every stripe, beginning with Mr. Mind (who is actually spotted, but never mind). In *DC COMICS PRESENTS #34* (June, 1981; by Roy Thomas, Rich Buckler, and Dick Giordano), the wicked worm recalls his origin as a mutant born on "a planet inhabited only by creeping, brainless grubs and night-crawlers and maggots—as inferior to me as an ape to Einstein" in terms which suggest that the tedium of this un-intellectually stimulating existence strongly contributed to his eventual decision to embark on a life of crime and interplanetary conquest. As the begoggled bug speaks bitterly of how he has been oppressed by "the slugs and aardvarks of outrageous fortune," a flashback shows a younger (but no more innocent) Mr. Mind discontentedly poking his head out of a hole in the ground to survey an unpromising vista of stupid-looking worms frolicking merrily among piles of dirt. The intellectual invertebrate's disgusted thought balloon sums up his attitude toward his native planet in a single word: "*Bor*-ing!" (p. 12).

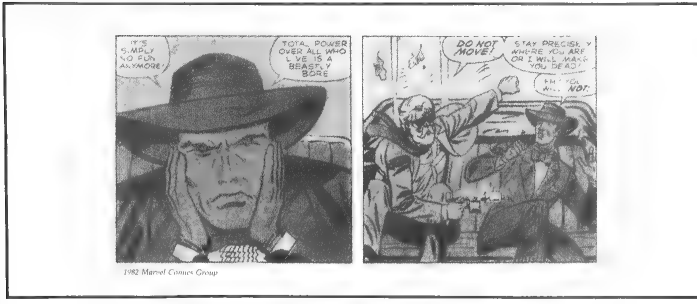
Another delightfully absurd story involving a super-villain who finds that his superior powers merely make life more monotonous is *MARVEL TEAM-UP ANNUAL #4*, scripted by Frank Miller and drawn by Herb Trimpe and Mike Esposito. The villain in question here is Killgrave, the Purple Man, whose blase attitude toward his hypnotic power over the minds of others makes for some hilarious scenes. One of the most notable of these is the scene in which the villain is accosted by Spider-Man after pettishly ordering two minor thugs to punch each other into unconsciousness as punishment for the careless driving that has put a sizeable dent in Killgrave's prized purple Rolls-Royce. Grabbing Killgrave by his natty purple dinner jacket, Spidey swings him around to face him, only to exclaim in disbelief, "You're—purple?!" "And you

are quite rude," the Purple Man says primly, shrugging Spidey's hand off his shoulder. "Sorry," the hypnotized hero replies meekly. "You should be," Killgrave sniffs. "Why don't you climb a lamppost or something?" The amazing arachnid accordingly scampers up the nearest streetlight, then asks obediently, "Okay, now what do I do?" Instructed to recite Shakespeare, Spider-Man stumbles through a few of the most oft-quoted lines, hanging upside down from the lamppost all the while, before giving up and protesting reasonably, "Look, I don't know a whole lot of Shakespeare!" "Well, what *do* you know?" Killgrave inquires. "How about Elvis Costello?" his mesmerized victim offers. "Elvis Costello it is." Spider-Man bursts out singing "Oliver's army is here to stayyy..." and the Purple Man nonchalantly strolls away, pausing only to order Spidey and the two thugs (who take a brief respite from beating each other to a pulp to respond, "Check" and "Sure") to forget he was ever there (pp. 2-3, 4).

This story also features another entertaining evil-doer, an Austrian assassin hired by the Kingpin to track down and bring in the man who disrupted one of the massive mob boss' heroin deliveries by telling the two hoods who rammed the Rolls-Royce to pummel each other into insensibility instead of continuing on their appointed rounds. Stalking the Purple Man to the posh Plaza Hotel, the indignant assassin finds, "Verdammt snobs won't let me in! Not dressed well enough, they say! But Heinrich von Schnickel-Schnapp will not be thwarted!" Heinrich determinedly follows Killgrave into Central Park where he uncomprehendingly watches the Purple Man order a young woman to join him for a carriage ride, first disposing of her date by commanding him to go jump in the lake. When the young man reports, "There aren't any lakes around," then suggests helpfully, "How about the Hudson River?", the puzzled hit man, who has failed to realize that anything out of the ordinary is going on, thinks resignedly, "I shall never understand American customs" (pp. 8-9, 10).

Meanwhile, back in the commandeered carriage, the Purple Man is attempting to put his hypnotic power to a particularly unscrupulous use which ties in with another of the 1981 trends—attempted rape. Fortunately for his unresisting intended victim, her hypnotically-induced passivity in response to his preliminary kiss turns Killgrave off, and he boots her out of the carriage, yelling, "You call that a kiss? Get out!" Alone once more, Killgrave's purple features crease in a discontented pout as he sulks, "It's simply no fun any more! Total power over all who live is a beastly bore." At this point, the Purple Man is so bored that he actually welcomes the abrupt entrance of the gun-toting Heinrich (who comes crashing into the carriage from an overhanging tree, shouting, "Stay precisely where you are—or I will make you dead!") in the hope that the explanation for this attempted assault will provide some sort of diversion (p. 10). Even after he makes the disconcerting discovery that the Kingpin, who inconveniently insists on dragging Killgrave into his latest trouble-fraught plan for gaining revenge on various super-heroes (Killgrave's own attitude is, "Who needs the grief?"), is even more completely immune to his hypnotic influence than Daredevil is, the Purple Man's main concern is with his own entertainment. As he tells Daredevil (who is in the process of choking himself to death at Killgrave's orders at the time), "It's a pity [that you have to die]. I've been a lonely man all these years. Slaves are convenient, but they are poor company. I've often wished for someone of independent will to talk to...to talk *with*...but we never talked, did we, Murdock? We only fought. And now, even the fighting must end...Ah, well. Perhaps that Kingpin fellow will make suitable company. He's a boor, but he seems to be well read" (p. 30).

After this incident, few readers can have been sorry to see Killgrave led off to jail at the end of the story, securely muzzled by a gag which will prevent him from exercising his hypnotic power by giving orders. Still, the Purple Man does have a certain charm in his less murderous moments. This is more than can be said for Samson Scythe (a/k/a Deathwatcher), the sadistic voyeur who is the villain of *CAPTAIN AMERICA ANNUAL #5*, written by David Michelinie and drawn by Gene Colan and Dave Simons.


IT'S SIMPLY NO FUN ANYMORE...
TOTAL POWER OVER ALL WHO LIVE IS A BEASTLY BORE
DO NOT MOVE!
STAY PRECISELY WHERE YOU ARE OR I WILL MAKE YOU DEAD!
I'M AFRAID NOT.

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Year in Review 1981 Year in Review 1981

As he tells Captain America, Scythe "was born...with the proverbial silver spoon in my mouth. My parents were rich; they had everything...by the time I had reached my teens, I had been everywhere, had seen and done it all. I was, in a word, bored. Bored to tears, to distraction...to dismay...In an effort to escape the suffocating ennui that had taken over my existence, I enlisted in the army...I was assigned to a tour of duty in Southeast Asia. And it was there that something very strange occurred: I found myself fascinated by one basic, elemental phenomenon—death! Whenever I witnessed someone dying, my pulse would race, my adrenalin would flow, and for the first time in years I felt...well...*alive*! But then, just when I had found a cure for the infernal boredom that threatened to engulf my whole being, tragedy struck! The war ended...I returned to America—and to tedium. Oh, the psychologists had fancy names for it, but the bottom line was that there was nothing in this world that I found stimulating. Food bored me. Women bored me. Even the very act of moving about bored me...I became a recluse, a hermit. My once-proud estate fell into the decay of neglect, and my once-sound body, as if in sympathy, deteriorated rapidly. Eventually, I found myself confined to a wheelchair, with my meals fed to me through a tube...for the most enthusiasm I could muster towards continuing my existence was a rather poorly-stifled yawn" (pp. 24-26 of an unpaginated story).

The cure Scythe finally found for his monumental *ennui* was murder. He hired Kenneth Hanson, an old army acquaintance of decidedly elastic scruples, to serve as his combination butler and impressario of assassination. It was Hanson's job to arrange for hit men to exterminate various muggers and other criminals (Scythe originally justified his homicidal hobby with the Punisher-like rationalization that by having only obvious undesirables killed, he was actually benefiting society) while Hanson filmed their death throes with a miniature video camera.

Soon these relatively small-time closed-circuit killings escalated into elaborate boobytraps designed to bring about a full-scale gang war between two of New York's rival mobs. When Captain America began to interfere with this plan, Scythe had an even better idea: "It occurred to me that if watching criminals die was so fulfilling, what would it be like to watch...a *hero* die?" (p. 27). Accordingly, he invites Cap to come and run the gauntlet at his suburban estate, unless the hero is willing to let Scythe's remote-control thrill-killings continue.

Naturally, Cap accepts the challenge, and a series of deadly "*Perils of Pauline*"-type stunts ensue, as Scythe looks on with an expression of mild interest. At one point, Captain America appears to have been suffocated by a stifling shower of gold dust that entirely fills the small closed room where he has been trapped. As the star-spangled super-hero disappears beneath the debris, Scythe smothers a yawn and remarks, "It seems we've lost the good Captain, Hanson. What a shame. This was *almost* getting to be exciting" (p. 33).

When, despite the overwhelming odds, Cap finally manages to fight his way through to the tower room from which the mad millionaire has been directing operations, Scythe (who would probably consider the opening ten minutes of *RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK* the cinematic equivalent of counting sheep) merely says tranquilly, "Perhaps this may yet work out for the best. It's been quite some time since I've watched a live death!" and directs his butler to dispose of Captain America with a small hand-held flame-thrower. The Captain horrifiedly protests that if Hanson uses the flame-thrower, not only Cap, but everyone else in the room will also be burnt to a crisp, but Scythe simply informs him that he has a fire extinguisher ready to save Hanson and himself. Unfortunately for him, the fuel tank of the flame thrower is shattered by a slightly off-target last-minute throw of Cap's shield, and Scythe finds himself tipped out of his wheelchair and on fire, with the fire extinguisher just out of reach a few feet away. He desperately crawls toward it, "but then, mere inches from CO_2 salvation, Samson Scythe's gaze crosses one of the room's many monitor screens—and he stops! For suddenly, ironically, he finds himself witnessing the *ultimate* death—his own!

OF COURSE I DID HAVE SOME-THING OF AN ULTERIOR MOTIVE—HAD MANHATTAN BEEN SPELLED I WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN ABLE TO WATCH ALL THE ACTION DIE BUT THE RESULT WHAT WHATEVER WEREN'T THEY.
MATTER E ACHIEVED

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And so he watches, enthralled, trapped in the mothlike mesmerism of his own destruction, while the flames push hungrily, greedily, forward..." (pp. 37-38).

Another millionaire who turns—or, in this case, returns—to crime out of sheer *ennui* (although with less grisly results) is the Monocle in *JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #195* (Oct. 1981; by Gerry Conway, George Perez, and John Beatty). As we are shown one view after another of the sumptuous estate of French laser tycoon Jonathan Cheval, formerly known as the Monocle, captions inform us that "despite his wealth, despite his social status, despite his scientific achievements, Jonathan Cheval is not a happy man...Jonathan Cheval is bored." Sure enough, Cheval is soon emitting contemptuous thought balloons about what a waste it is to put his "techno-optical triumphs" to trivial law-abiding uses like building a better doorlock. Finally he remarks aloud, "There are days when I wish I were still a criminal. The life of a prosperous businessman is driving me mad" (p.2). At this point, the villainous Ultra-Humanite steps forth on cue to offer the blase businessman the chance to be the first criminal on his block to join the new Secret Society of Super-Villains and terrorize two worlds. Naturally, the Monocle accepts, and so another epic JLA/JSA team-up begins.

A third villain who became a bad guy out of sheer boredom is Gerry Conway's revised version of Catman, who appears in *DETECTIVE #509* (Dec. '81, drawn by Don Newton and Dan Adkins). In this story, *"Nine Lives Has the Cat..."*, the male cat-criminal tells the bound and helpless Batman, "Once...I thought it would relieve my boredom to outwit you in the game of crime. You were too much the master for me to become a crime-fighter rival...so instead, I became an enemy" (p. 12). Catman then complains for several panels about how the spoilsport Caped Crusader ruined this diverting game by proceeding to defeat him, the Catman, every time they clashed. Finally, the feline felon finishes his self-pitying recapitulation of his previous career and departs, leaving Batman to drown—a uniquely appropriate fate for someone whom he regards as such a big-time wet blanket.

And now for a totally irrelevant aside (how do you think this column got its name, anyway?). This has nothing to do with this year's trends, but while we're still on the subject of boredom, this strikes me as an ideal opportunity for my editors to reprint that dandy panel of Gamora whining, "Thanos, I'm bored!" from an old issue of *Warlock*. Not to mention the equally great scene from *Portia Prinz of the Glamazons* Vol. 1, #3 (soon to be reprinted as *PP* Vol. 2, #1) in which Portia's brother Poliphar demands of his mischievous little daughters, "Didn't I tell you to try to stay out of trouble?", only to have them chorus in reply, "We tried, Poliphar—but we got bored."

More recently, even the good guys have become infected with *ennui*. In *THOR #314* (Dec. '81)—written by Doug Moench and drawn by Keith Pollard, Dan Green, and Pablo Marcos—Moondragon, the morally ambivalent Drax the Destroyer, and even the mighty Thor himself are all suffering from existential *Angst* inspired by the fact that they no longer seem to have any purpose in life or anything to do.

At the beginning of the story, Thor's mortal alter ego, Dr. Don Blake, stands disconsolately staring out the window, thinking, "Well, now that I've lost my position down at the clinic due to lack of government funding—what next? There seems to be nothing for me to do, no place for me to go, no future for me here in—" At this point, Blake's musings are interrupted by a phone call from an old med school classmate inviting him to a seminar on new surgical techniques. When Don responds to a question about how his practice is going with the confession that he doesn't have a practice—or a job—at the moment, his former classmate, Shawna Lynde,

THANOS:
I'M BORED!
YES, IT IS A PITY YOU CAN'T AID ME IN MY WORK.
STILL, THERE MUST BE SOMETHING YOU MIGHT DO...
OF COURSE
YOU'VE YOUR PREC... MACHINES TO PUTTER WITH CONSTANTLY WHILE I'VE NOTHING TO KEEP ME OCCUPIED, SAVE WATCHING YOU...
--AND, TO BE QUITE FRANK THAT'S BORING!
E...I REGRETTABLY, I NEED YOU FOR PHYSICAL PROWESS AND NOT SCIENTIFIC ABILITY

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suggests he stay a few extra days in Chicago after the seminar so she can show him around the city. Blake accepts, thinking, "Might as well—nothin' better to do...but in the meantime, it's back to square one. Lost and lonely, with no real goal or purpose—and far too much self-pity" (p. 2 of an unpaginated story). A few pages later, Blake's phone rings again, with a dinner invitation—and a tantalizing mention of some sort of "proposition"—from Tony Stark. Blake momentarily perks up enough to reply, "Sounds great, Tony—see you then," but "the glumness returns as soon as he racks the phone." This time Don's discontented thought balloon reads, "I feel like a man whose future consists of two events. I've got to do *something*—and if Blake is pretty much useless for the time being...then maybe it's time to change matters, and become—Thor the Mighty!" (p.8).

Unfortunately, this quick-change dos little to alleviate Don's frustration, since his Asgardian alter ego soon discovers, "'Tis a rare, calm night—when even evil and violence seem content to slumber in peace...And for that I should be thankful, as should all those who dwell in the city—yet it deprives even Thor of any mission or duty." On a whim, the thunder god decides to drop in at Avengers Mansion, only to be informed by Jarvis that all of his fellow Assemblers are elsewhere "attending to personal matters." "The day then is destined for boredom," Thor thinks gloomily. "But what did I expect—? To arrive just as some dire menace threatened? Nay, I am simply restless here on Midgard. Yet even on Asgard, I felt purposeless, merely another god among so many...Have I become a being, then, whose existence—both mortal and immortal—is devoid of meaning and purpose? Am I truly unneeded anyw[here?]" (pp. 8-10).

At this point; the wished-for crisis finally materializes in the form of Moondragon, who enters carrying the injured Drax the Destroyer over her shoulder. Earlier, we had seen Moondragon seated at the controls of her aimlessly wandering spacecraft, indulging in thoughts similar to those that had plagued Don Blake: "Aside from my occasional dealings with the Avengers, there is no reason for me to remain on Earth—nothing to hold me—Even though I was born on the planet, it is now difficult for me to empathize with normal humans and their small affairs. And even Titan, where I was raised, no longer holds great attraction for me, not since the choice [of the Celestial Madonna] was made [and Moondragon was passed over in favor of Mantis, thus being deprived of the role for which she had been groomed for most of her life]. Now I have begun to feel the full void of purpose, destiny, commitment—and my thoughts increasingly dwell on the past...and on my *real* father" (p. 3). This turns out to be none other than Drax the Destroyer—sort of. It seems that after the incident in the Nevada desert in which Thanos blasted the car containing the future Moondragon and her parents, totaling the car and killing the parents (obviously, Moondragon herself miraculously survived), the soul of Moondragon's father was rescued by the Titan Mentor. "That soul was the foundation of a new creation—Drax the Destroyer—a being created from death and designed for one purpose...to destroy Thanos" (p. 4).

Meanwhile, Drax, who has been deprived of that purpose by Thanos' recent death at the hands of Captain Marvel, streaks angrily through space, brooding about the futility of his continued existence: "Still I remain a useless force in the cosmos—a spark of life without goal or purpose! I have been deprived by Thanos of a normal life—of even knowing my daughter! And even though I was permitted to live on, it was only as a single-minded entity of obsession, with no room for the cherished aspects of life—no room for anything but the single goal of destroying Thanos, he who had destroyed me." Through flashbacks, we learn that after Drax had overcome his initial rage over the fact that this destruction was accomplished by Captain Marvel, rather than himself, his

I RETURNED TO THIS WORLD OF MY BIRTH, TO SEE WHAT IT CONSISTS OF. YOU HAVE, INDEED, SHOWN ME MUCH OF IT.
NOW, HOWEVER, I MUST HAVE MY FREEDOM, TO WANDER WHERE I WILL.
YET THOUGH WE ARE WORLD APART, YOU HAVE GRANTED ME GREAT KINDNESS. I RESPECT YOU. SINGLY AND TOGETHER--THOUGH WE ARE WORLDS APART.
IF OUR PATHS CROSS AGAIN, IT WILL BE AS ALLIES.
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exposure to Mar-Vell's "cosmic essence of life" briefly helped him to find hope of achieving a new, more constructive reason for being. Unfortunately, "my first hope was in vain. Out here...beyond Mar-Vell's influence, I realize that the concept of becoming a creator [instead of a destroyer] is—for me—a jest of huge and dark proportions. There is nothing left for me, then, but to seek my own destruction" (pp. 5-6).

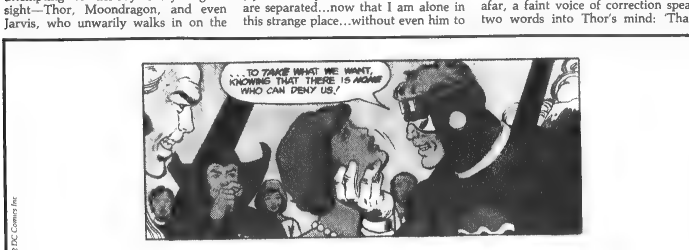
Accordingly, Drax tries to commit suicide by plunging headfirst into the "hive" of a community of cosmically-charged jellyfish-like creatures who float around the galaxy in their own self-contained closed ecosphere, warning people not to disturb them or else. Wedged partway in and partway out of the bubblelike "hive" like Winnie-the-Pooh in the rabbithole, Drax is finally expelled by the sacrifice of one of the "jellyfish", which hurls itself at him and wraps itself around his head, giving off some kind of painful semi-electrical charge, until they are both propelled out of the hive and back into the void of space (pp. 6-7). It is here that Moondragon, who had previously decided to relieve her painful feelings of purposelessness by tracking down the man who was once her father, finds Drax floating, wounded, and decides to rush him to Avengers Mansion for help (pp. 7, 9).

When Drax, still wearing the "jellyfish" wrapped around his head like an oversized stocking cap that comes down over his eyes, regains consciousness and realizes that his life has been saved, he erupts in fury, attempting to destroy everything in sight—Thor, Moondragon, and even Jarvis, who unwarily walks in on the two self-styled gods' confrontation with the desperate Destroyer. (You'd think that by now the Avengers' butler would have learned to stay in the kitchen when he hears the sounds of a fight in progress, but then, if he had, the story would be several pages too short.)

Hindered by the need to protect Jarvis and the fact that the "jellyfish" enveloping most of Drax's head somehow blocks Moondragon's attempts to calm him down by the use of her much-vaunted mental powers, the two Avengers aren't faring too well. Finally, Thor decides that the only way to defeat their maddened antagonist (whom they believe is being mentally controlled by the "jellyfish") without severely injuring him is to summon some lightning bolts "to separate yon thing from [Drax's] head!" (p. 12). Although this subdues Drax momentarily, when Moondragon tries to reason with him, he quickly gives vent to despair once more, exclaiming, "No! I want only destruction! I want you to—" "—Destroy me," the now-detached "jellyfish" completes the sentence telepathically. "Please, I beg you," it continues, "Destroy me. Without my hive, without other like me, there is nothing to live for. My purpose has been served. There is no meaning for me..." "No...meaning?" Drax, Moondragon, and Thor echo in unison, all struck with startled recognition. The "jellyfish" explains, "When the green one [Drax] threatened our hive, it was my duty to [attempt to] destroy him...When we entered this world's atmosphere, I sensed danger and began to feed on his remaining life, integrating with that life [symbiotically]...but now...now that we are separated...now that I am alone in this strange place...without even him to share my life...there is no reason to go on...no meaning...no purpose...and only the hope of destruction" (p. 14).

At this, all three of the listening superbeings fall into a thoughtful silence, pondering the "haunting familiarity" of the creature's despairing plea. "Finally, it is Thor who breaks the silence..." "Drax," the thunder god asks, "Know ye where yon thing dwelt?" "Y-yes...yes, I do know," the erstwhile Destroyer replies. Then. . . we could. . ." Moondragon begins hesitantly. "Return it to its hive—to its home," Drax responds. "Yes, Moondragon...yes, my daughter...we could do that. And it would be a good thing to do." "And during the journey, father, perhaps we could talk of the past, and of the other things to do...in the future," Moondragon suggests, "...a future with no further acts of destruction" (p. 15).

Having at last discovered a new purpose in life, father and daughter board Moondragon's spacecraft and depart on their mission of mercy. A pleased Thor returns to the interior of the mansion, where he finds Jarvis resignedly sweeping up the wreckage resulting from the just-concluded fight. "And here I thought I had nothing to do for the day," the butler sighs. "Ah, well, there's plenty to do now." "Aye, Jarvis, there is indeed much a man may do...and mayhap even more a god may do," Thor answers enthusiastically. "I thank thee." "But you saved my life, sir. Why are you thanking me?" the bewildered manservant asks. "For simply being what thou art...and for reminding me of that treasure," Thor replies. A caption-box in the corner of the panels adds the final touch: "From afar, a faint voice of correction speaks two words into Thor's mind: Thank



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you—' " (p. 15). And with that heartwarming reaffirmation of super-heroic purpose, the story ends.

Another of this year's trends that first made itself felt in full force this summer is attempted rape (and various situations approaching it). Besides the Purple Man's quickly-abandoned and rather oblique effort in *MARVEL TEAM-UP ANNUAL #4*, alluded to earlier, there's Brainwave's brutal intentions toward Kathy, the standoffish actress in *JLA #197* (Dec. 1981; by Gerry Conway, Keith Pollard, and George Perez). Walking into her dressing room, thinking that there are "too many wolves in this [business]," the unfortunate Kathy finds the brain-blast-powered villain standing there gloating. "Good evening, my dear. Allow me to introduce myself—I'm your new lover!" Brainwave announces, adding sadistically, "Scream if you like. No one can help you. No one can stop Brainwave now!" (p. 14).

At this point, there is a strategic fade-out. When next seen, Kathy is still fully clothed (except for her shoes) and not particularly disheveled-looking, though obviously thoroughly terrorized. Presumably we—or the Comics Code—are supposed to assume that the actual sexual assault has not yet taken place (unless Brainwave has some kind of neatness fetish). This seems a bit difficult to believe, in view of the fact that since we last saw the luckless Kathy and her would-be rapist, an involved sequence of events has taken place, beginning with a disgruntled faction of the Secret Society of Super-Villains attempting to avenge themselves on their former comrades by releasing the trapped JLA and JSAers from their prison in limbo. After several fruitless attempts at this, the determined criminals finally succeed, only to be trounced by the enraged heroes, who then set up an elaborate trap for the remaining super-villains at their Sinister Citadel in Nepal. Even the caption acknowledges that all these complicated actions occupied "some time" (p. 20), so one can only assume from Kathy's intact clothing and unmussed hair that Brainwave whiled away the interim by delivering an X-rated version of the standard super-villain "here's the counterproductively convoluted way I'm going to make you suffer, good guy" speech to his helpless victim. Even so, this is hardly an edifying story element.

Another attempted rape sequence appears in *JLA #195* (Oct. 1981), also written by Conway and drawn by Perez. In this one, the spaced-out Cheetah, wandering the streets near the waterfront in a daze after her near-drowning in a recent issue of *WONDER WOMAN*, is set upon by three sleazy thugs whose opening line is, "Hey, sister, how 'bout a kiss fer me an' my buddies? Be nice, an' we won't hurt yuh—much" (p.6). To their dismay, it is the Cheetah who hurts them—a lot (since she has Wolverine-like razor-sharp metal claws).

Actually, the entire 1981 JLA/JSA team-up is chock-full of nasty litle scenes with sinister sexual overtones. Besides the two out-and-out attempted rapes described above, there's the way Killer Frost, the archetypal Gerry Conway psychotic man-hating female (significantly nicknamed "the Ice Maiden") keeps going around cooing lovingly at the even more thoroughly deranged Cheetah (whom she addresses as "my darling"), and reacting to even relatively innocent overtures from her male fellow-criminals as if, for instance, Signalman's offering to help her up is a combination sexual assault and attempt to infect her with leprosy (*JLA #197*, p. 7). The *piece de resistance* in this line is the panel in which the utterly crazed Cheetah, who hates everybody, especially super-heroes, snarls, "Let me kill him [the Elongated Man, whom the super-villains have just overpowered]. He's one of *them*..." and Killer Frost calmly replies, "I sympathize, Cheetah. All men deserve death—or worse" (*JLA #197*, p. 11). Only if their names are Gerry Conway.

In addition to these gems of four-color art, there is the December cover-date Hostess™ Cup Cakes ad, "*Spider-Man's Dream Girl*," which *LOC* editor Bob Soron has pointed out to me contains dialogue which could be construed as a threat of gang rape. This thoroughly surreal ad, which is at least three times as bizarre as the average Twinkie-page offering (which is saying quite a lot), begins with a scene of Peter Parker

PETER PARKER HAS FINALLY FOUND ENOUGH COURAGE TO ASK OUT HIS DREAM GIRL, BEAUTIFUL LISA SKYE.
WHAT A BEAUTIFUL VIEW!
IT'S SO ROMANTIC.
TAKE A DIVE, TWERP. WE'LL SHOW THIS DOLL WHAT'S ROMANTIC!
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sitting on a bench by the river at night, accompanied by a sultry blonde utterly unfamiliar to even the most dedicated longtime Marvel maniac. The caption informs us, "Peter Parker has finally found enough courage to ask out his dream girl, beautiful Lisa Skye." (If only Lisa Skye—who is addressed by her full name throughout [as in "Whatever you say, Lisa Skye!"]—were wearing diamonds and named Lucy instead of Lisa, I could provide the perfect explanation for her inexplicable and uncontinuity-ish inclusion here: the Hostess™ Cup Cakes are laced with LSD. Why else would a gang of thugs drop everything to begin mouthing inane encomiums about fudgy icing and creamed filling when Spider-Man is doing nothing more alarming than pelting them with pre-packaged pastries? But I digress.)

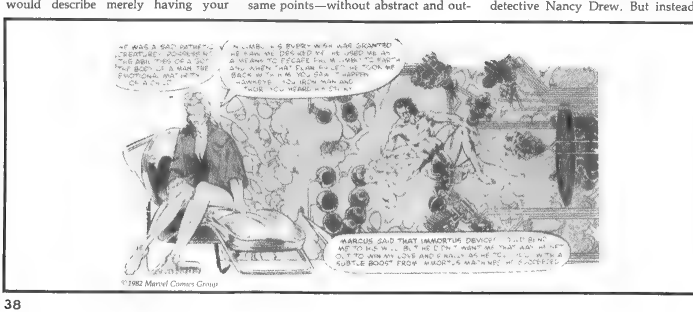
To return to the tender riverside scene between Peter Parker and his mysterious unknown dream girl: Peter says, "What a beautiful view!" Lisa Skye says, "It's so romantic." The gang of thugs (who in panel #2 abruptly emerge from the bushes, grab Lisa, and toss Peter into the river) say, "Take a dive, twerp. We'll show this doll what's romantic!"

Frankly, this entire episode, with its obligatory ensuing cupcake-flinging (which, as I said before, has the usual miraculous effect—I can't imagine why Dick Tracy never mentioned these gooey goodies in his *"Crime-Stopper's Textbook"*), strikes me as too insanely off the wall to be really worth pondering. However, for what it's worth, it seems unlikely that even Hostess-hired small-time street punks would describe merely having your purse snatched as "romantic," even in a moment of heavy-handed sarcasm. Further than this I refuse to speculate. Too much writing about Twinkies and their sister products obviously turns the mind to mush, and I'm not taking any chances.

Finally, there is *AVENGERS ANNUAL #10* (written by Chris Claremont, pencilled by Michael Golden, and inked by Armando Gil), whose final five pages are entirely devoted to recriminations over Ms. Marvel's rape-by-brainwashing in the infamous *AVENGERS #200* (scripted by David Michelinie and approved by God knows how many editors). In this annual, Carol (Ms. Marvel) Danvers, who has finally shaken off the will-sapping influence of the machines employed to enhance her cooperation by Immortus' late limbo-bound son, Marcus, makes a long, impassioned speech to the Avengers about how they should have questioned Marcus' glibly implausible explanations instead of unhesitatingly accepting them, and how they should have expressed more concern for her, Ms. Marvel, while she was undergoing the trauma of a spectacularly unnatural and inexplicable pregnancy, instead of simply reacting with knee-jerk cootchy-cooing over the impending baby. All of these points are important and needed to be made in a Marvel comic, to the same general audience that unthinkingly accepted the offensive and incoherent "rape" story itself. (After all, everyone can't have read Carol Strickland's slightly overwrought (but on target) article on *"The Rape of Ms. Marvel"* in *LOC #1*, which makes essentially the same points—without abstract and out-of-place *ON MORAL FICTION*-inspired interpolations about the nature of heroism in general or melodramatic asides from Spider-Woman about how she wishes she could stand beside her newfound bosom buddy Carol in her hour of agonized tonguelashing, instead of merely eavesdropping from a nearby room with her ultrasensitive hearing.) However, this corrective addendum to *AVENGERS #200* did seem rather out of place (not to mention belated) as the conclusion of a story which basically had nothing at all to do with the rape and not very much to do with Ms. Marvel. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure, gang. Let's not let it happen again.

***

One of the older 1981 trends, which was quite prominent toward the beginning of the year, but has been de-emphasized more recently, is the theme of parents trying to run their children's lives—by force, if necessary. In fact, this theme is one of the most notable features of the origin of the Dazzler, as told in the first issue of her own title (March 1981; scripted by Tom DeFalco, penciled by John Romita Jr., and inked by Alfredo Alcala). Broke and freezing in an unheated apartment whose refrigerator is as bare as her pocketbook, aspiring singer Alison Blaire thinks back on her earlier life as the motherless daughter of overbearing attorney Carter Blaire. Blaire is like a nightmare version of the similarly first-named Carlton Drew, that other well-known widowed attorney father of a youthful heroine—girl detective Nancy Drew. But instead of



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doting on his only daughter like the indulgent Carlton Drew, Carter Blaire (who, according to Alison's Grandma Bella, has been "unable to express his real feelings since he...lost...[Alison's] mother," p. 11) rants and raves whenever Ali listens to her stereo or speaks of her ambition to be a singer.

As Blaire sees it, his daughter's future lies in the courtoom, not the recording studio, and he's not taking no for an answer. Even when Alison is only twelve or thirteen, her father scowlingly denies her request for permission to enter a school talent contest on the grounds that, "Your studies come first! If you want to attend a better law school, you must start working now...while you're still in junior high!" (p. 11). Although she manages to sing with a succession of small-time bands on the side, for years, Alison "follows her father's master plan...completing high school and entering a prestigious pre-law program." Not until the day she graduates from college does Ali finally dare to defy her tyrannical father outright. When Blaire follows Grandma Bella's congratulations to the girl with the self-satisfied statement, "*Magna cum laude*—and you'll be attending the law school I've chosen for you in the fall!", Alison counters, "No, Daddy...for too many years I've been split between law and music, your dream and my own! I must be true to myself..." "Stop!" her hard-hearted parent cries dramatically. "I've heard enough! Go...if you must—but don't expect my blessing...or forgiveness!!!" (p. 18).

After this scenery-chewing out-take from a bad Victorian melodrama, only a peabrain like Alison (who habitually acts like such an airhead that it's hard to imagine how her father could even expect her to pass the LSATs, much less actually earn a degree from a "better law school") would go back for more. But go back she does, in *DAZZLER #3* (May 1981; again scripted by DeFalco and drawn by Romita Jr., with help from A. Kupperberg, D. Bulandi, and A. Gil). Having decided that "the time has come for a painful confrontation," Ali returns to her father's house on Long Island to try to patch things up after an estrangement of two years. Entering her father's study accompanied by her grandmother, Alison sobs, "Hello, Daddy! I...(sob) I...I've missed you so much! I'm sorry...for all the trouble between us! I never meant to hurt you..." "That's all in the past now!" her father replies, awkwardly patting her on the back. "I always knew you'd come to your senses...you'd return...and start doing things my way." Horrified by Blaire's smug misapprehension, Alison replies, "Daddy, I came to make peace between us...but, nothing else has changed! I'm not staying..." "Then, you've wasted my time...as well as your own!" the pigheaded *paterfamilias* growls. "There can never be peace between us...as long as you continue to defy my wishes!" So saying, Blaire turns his back and stalks out of the room. Ali's grandmother tries to comfort her, but the girl brushes her well-intentioned reassurances aside, declaring, "He's right, Nana! I know that now! I...won't make this same mistake...again!" (p. 10). So far, she hasn't—though that's about the only bubbleheaded thing the dippy Dazzler hasn't done in the all-too-many issues of her cockamamie comic that have been published since.

Marvel's other new solo heroine, Jennifer (She-Hulk) Walters, also had difficulties with a dictatorial father, even though she actually *is* a lawyer (a job which seems to have become some sort of post-feminist icon of female prestige, though it is all too often presented as being merely the new equivalent in high status of the old feminine ideal of marrying a doctor or a millionaire).

Jen's problems with her father, Sheriff Morris Walters (who, like Carter Blaire, has been a widower for many years), are not caused by her job preference, but by the career choices she makes within her (in itself) perfectly acceptable profession. The trouble begins in *SHE-HULK #12* (Jan., 1981; script by David Anthony Kraft, art by Mike Vosburg and Frank Springer), when she enters the courthouse and encounters her father, who immediately launches into a prolonged tirade about some unspecified misdeed of Jennifer's: "Thank the Lord your mother's not alive to see what you've done to yourself! It would break her heart!...I thought I raised you to respect the law, not to abuse it! I see now that I was wrong!" Mystified over what could have prompted this outburst, Jennifer jumps to the conclusion, "Only one thing could make him this mad—somehow he must have found out—that I'm the She-Hulk!" As Sheriff Walters rants on and on, Jen hangs her head in shame and finally stammers a few words of apology, only to discover too late that the cause of her

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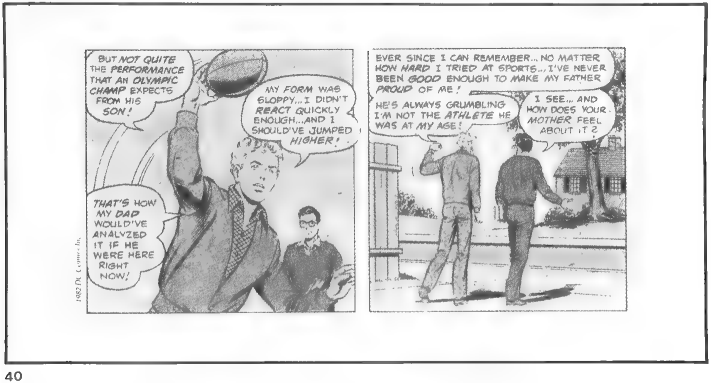
father's anger is a (false) newspaper report that she is to defend former vampire Michael Morbius in his upcoming trial for mass murder. Unfortunately, by that time it is too late for Jennifer to retract her "confession" without arousing suspicions about what it was she was really apologizing for. All Jen can say in her own defense is, "Dad, it's not what it seems"—a statement which merely provokes a fresh harangue from the hot-tempered sheriff: "I want to believe you—but I can't. You're not the same girl I raised! You've turned into a monster—someone I don't recognize any more! Now get out before I—" (pp. 6-7).

Thanks to the efforts of a middle-aged gold-digger named Beverly who seems to have moved in with Sheriff Walters (who lives in a condominium, while his daughter occupies the family house, rent-free), the rift between father and daughter widens in succeeding issues. By issue #15 (April, 1981), Beverly is urging Walters to sell the house right out from under Jen—a plan he takes steps to carry out in #18 (July, 1981). But in #22 (Nov., 1981), the sheriff finally begins to realize that Beverly has been tearing up Jen's letters and otherwise intercepting her attempts to communicate with him. As of this writing, it looks as if father and daughter may actually be reconciled just in time for the She-Hulk's comic to be cancelled—a truly heartwarming prospect.[1]

In addition to being a running subplot in *DAZZLER* and *THE SHE-HULK*, the theme of domineering parents meddling with their children's lifestyles and career choices has made its influence felt in *NEW TEEN TITANS* and the various "*Batman*" titles in the form of the ongoing tension between Batman and Robin over the latter's decision to leave college. This theme has also been a major element of several individual stories within the last year, most notably "*This Sporting Death*" in *BATMAN #338* (Aug., 1981; scripted by Gerry Conway, with a plot assist from Roy Thomas; art by Irv Novick and Frank McLaughlin). Like so many Gerry Conway stories, this is the tale of a psychotic criminal who was warped for life by a trauma experienced in youth—in this case, a father who is literally crazy about sports and becomes obsessed with forcing his son, a merely average athlete, to be a champion at every sport. When yelling and hitting fail to achieve this goal, the father, a shady practitioner of sports medicine, forcibly injects the boy with the memory RNA of athletes in the hope that this will cause his body to chemically "learn" their skills, coordination, etc. At first it works—the son becomes a star athlete in high school. But by the time he finishes college, ominous side effects have begun to appear. Virtually incapacitated by continuous agonizing headaches, the young man finally consults a doctor, who informs him that "something, some foreign substance, was affecting my nervous system...I was going to die. It was Dad's memory RNA, of course." At this point, the vengeful victim tells Batman, "I realized...what I'd always known in my heart—my athletic ability was a chemical-induced sham! Now it was killing me—so I became the Sportsman! I couldn't repay Father for what he'd done [since he had disappeared years before]—so I did the next best thing! I used my engineering skills to create my costume and weapons [such as electrified hockey sticks]. Now I take my revenge on the sports world—and I play my game for keeps!" (pp. 15-16).

Finally, a relatively harmless instance of parents trying to re-shape their child into something more to their liking, instead of accepting him for himself, serves as the springboard for the plot of "*The Super-Secret of Smallville*," written by Cary Bates and drawn by Kurt Schaffenberger and Dave Hunt (*SUPERBOY #16*, April 1981). This story concerns Christopher Drayton, the son of famed Olympic athlete Dan Drayton and Nobel Prize-winning scientist Dr. Elaine Crosley.* Chris is neither as successful at athletics as his father nor as brilliant academically as his mother, a fact which Dr. Crosley hopes to rectify by finding and "borrowing" the Kryptonian artifact she believes Superboy must use to recharge his powers periodically.

Chris' parents are not nearly as openly disappointed in their son and as obsessed with making him over into a more outstanding specimen as is suggested by the cover (which shows Dr.


BUT NOT QUITE THE PERFORMANCE THAT AN OLYMPIC CHAMP EXPECTS FROM HIS SON!
MY FORM WAS GLOPPY...I DIDN'T REACT QUICKLY ENOUGH...AND I SHOULD'VE JUMPED HIGHER!
THAT'S HOW MY DAD WOULD'VE ANALYZED IT IF HE WERE HERE RIGHT NOW!
EVER SINCE I CAN REMEMBER...NO MATTER HOW HARD I TRIED AT SPORTS...I'VE NEVER BEEN GOOD ENOUGH TO MAKE MY FATHER PROUD OF ME!
HE'S ALWAYS GRUMBLING I'M NOT THE ATHLETE HE WAS AT MY AGE!
I SEE... AND HOW DOES YOUR MOTHER FEEL ABOUT IT?

Corsley in a mad scientist-type pose, exclaiming, "I've found it—the secret of Superboy's power! Now I'll use it to transfer *his* might to *my* son!") and the splash page (which shows Chris not quite clearing a hurdle, as his father remarks, "I'm ready to throw in the towel, Elaine! No matter how hard I train Chris to be the athlete I was—he just can't measure up!" and his wife replies, "I know how you feel, Dan! His Scholastic Aptitude Test was just as disappointing! It looks like our son doesn't have what it takes to be a Drayton!"). In fact, unlike the other interfering parents described above, Dan Drayton and Elaine Crosley seem to genuinely love their son, even though he isn't quite the ideal offspring they might have preferred. They worry about the possible reasons for Chris' excusing himself earlly from dinner at the Smallville Hotel, and when he is kidnapped by some of the inevitable small-time crooks who seem to have nothing better to do than hang around Smallville dreaming up new ways to get arrested by Superboy, they are as thoroughly horrified as any proper parents would be. In vivid contrast to the meddling parents of the Dazzler, the She-Hulk, and the murderous Sportsman, it is easy to believe that these parents are motivated primarily by some misguided wish to do what's best for their child, not by the warped vicarious ego trip the fathers of the Dazzler and the Sportsman, especially, project onto their hapless offspring.

But even in this comparatively benign form, unrealistic parental expectations can be harmful, as Cary Bates makes a point of having those model parents, the Kents, tell us. As Pa Kent says to Clark, "I'd be willing to bet Chris' parents gained a valuable lesson out of this experience—along the lines of loving their son for what he is—instead of trying to mold him into something he isn't!" (p. 17).

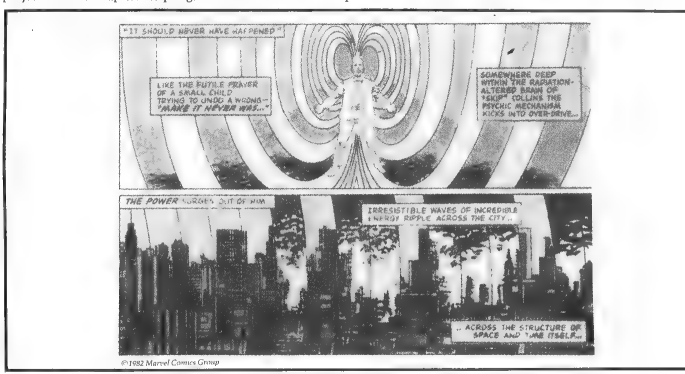
***

Two other 1981 themes which are so far somewhat less prevalent, though they seem to have been recurring more frequently in comics recently, are dreams coming true (which I will discuss at length in an upcoming column) and homage to Will Eisner. Eisner has become the focus of even more widespread attention from fans than usual within the past year or so, as the famed master of the comics medium has begun to contribute new material of various kinds to the Kitchen Sink *SPIRIT* magazine, and even to submit occasional critical articles on topics such as *"The Alternative Comic Book Press"* (*THE COMICS JOURNAL #63*, May 1981) to the same fanzines which continue to publish intricate analyses by others of the art and aesthetics of *THE SPIRIT*.

This heightening of the customary spotlight on Eisner and his work, particularly *THE SPIRIT*, appears to have been the inspiration for one self-proclaimed tribute to Will Eisner in the form of a rather unremarkable Batman story by Gerry Conway, Don Newton, and Dan Adkins and two interesting, if unsuccessful, attempts to apply the techniques employed in some of the most oft-praised *"Spirit"* stories to more standardized super-hero titles—namely *FANTASTIC FOUR* and *MOON KNIGHT*. In *"The Man With the Power"* (*FF #234*, Sept. 1981; story and art by John Byrne) and *"Stained-Glass Scarlet"* (*MOON KNIGHT #14*, Dec. 1981; story by Doug Moench, art by Bill Sienkiewicz), the respective comics creators seem to be trying to achieve the same effect produced by those heart-tugging (not to say sentimental) *"Spirit"* stories in which the title character is virtually shoved offstage to make room for a pathos-filled character study of some humble and/or unhappy soul who suffers the slings and arrow (or slugs and aardvarks) of outrageous fortune (not to mention the ever-popular man's inhumanity to man) shrouded in the spreading shadows of an abundance of chiaroscuro lighting effects. [2]

The script of *FF #234*'s *"The Man With the Power"* sticks especially close to the

[2]As the discerning reader will have deduced by now, I personally prefer those Eisner stories which center on some kind of battle of wits involving the Spirit himself, preferably with one of his more interesting adversaries such as Silk Satin or P'Gell.


"IT SHOULD NEVER HAVE HAPPENED"
LIKE THE FUTILE PRAYER OF A SMALL CHILD TRYING TO UNDO A WRONG— "MAKE IT NEVER WAS..."
SOMEWHERE DEEP WITHIN THE RADIATION-ALTERED BRAIN OF "SKIP" COLLINS THE PSYCHIC MECHANISM KICKS INTO OVER-DRIVE...
THE POWER SURGES OUT OF HIM
IRRESISTIBLE WAVES OF INCREDIBLE ENERGY RIPPLE ACROSS THE CITY...
...ACROSS THE STRUCTURE OF SPACE AND TIME ITSELF...
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formula characteristic of such sentimental *"Spirit"* stories, of which the most often enthused over is the one about Gerhard Schnobble, the man who could fly, but nobody noticed. This is actually not very surprising, since Byrne has merely borrowed the plot of that tale and jazzed it up with a few science-fictional twists (for example, Byrne's meek little "man with the power" gained his amazing ability to alter reality by simply subconsciously wishing things otherwise as a result of participating in an Army-sponsored atom-bomb experiment) in an attempt to shoe-horn this sudsy little story into the superficially hyper-rational universe of the Fantastic Four, with their headquarters crammed with gleaming gadgets and their leader spouting non-stop pseudo-scientific gibberish.

Also unsurprisingly, the attempt does not succeed. Galactus knows the FF have had their tear-jerking moments—and plenty of them—in the past, but the Eisnerian pathos of the lower-middle-class mute inflorious Milton who gives this tale its title simply does not belong in the same story as the crude soap opera of a scene in which the Human Torch pleads with Frankie Raye to "Just give me the chance to prove my love—give me the chance to show you once and for all that you mean more to me than being Johnny Storm, boy superhero!"' and receives a breathless, "Oh—oh, Johnny!" in reply (p. 12 of an unpaginated story). The jarring discordance between the Eisnerian "guest star" and theme and the two-dimensionally technology-oriented, one-note personalities of the ostensible stars of the book is further aggravated by Byrne's glaringly inappropriate razzle-dazzle artwork, which is utterly unsuited to a melancholy mood piece of this kind.

It would be difficult to imagine anything more un-atmospheric in the sense required here than Byrne's super-streamlined renderings, in which every surface seems to gleam as if unnaturally immaculate and every corner is so sharply-defined that it appears to have been drawn with a T-square. To top it all off, there is a near-total absence of shadows anywhere, even where the emotional tone of the Eisnerian subject matter most cries out for them. (This is not to say that spreading pools of ink all over the page is the only way to achieve atmospheric (to say nothing of subtle characterizational) effects visually [though the prevalence of striking areas of shadow is quite notable in the work of such acknowledged masters of these aspects of comics art as Milton Caniff and Gene Colan, in addition to Eisner himself]. However, if the script of your story is essentially an adaptation of something that's been successfully done before, right down to the *Weltschmerz* permeating the prose of the captions, you'd better think long and hard before selecting an artistic style that is the antithesis of that employed in the model you are so respectfully emulating.)

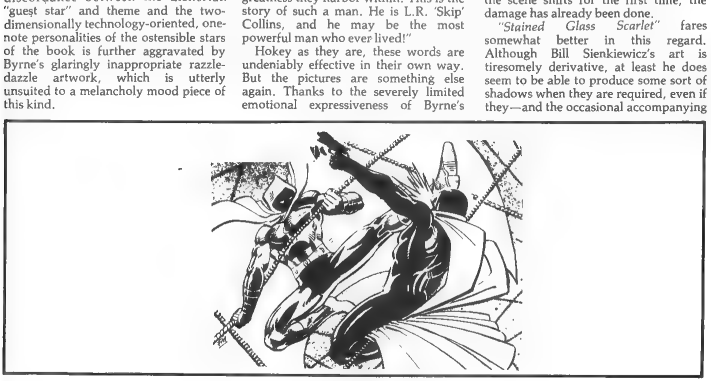
The splash page is positively ludicrous in this respect. The captions are full of gently brooding sentimental pessimism: "Shakespeare wrote: 'Some are born great—some achieve greatness—and some have greatness thrust upon them'...Then there are those who live their lives in obscurity, unaware of the greatness they harbor within. This is the story of such a man. He is L.R. 'Skip' Collins, and he may be the most powerful man who ever lived!"

Hokey as they are, these words are undeniably effective in their own way. But the pictures are something else again. Thanks to the severely limited emotional expressiveness of Byrne's artistic style, the subject of all this portentious philosophizing sits poker-faced on the edge of his bed, looking thoroughly unworthy of our attention. Although he is evidently supposed to have just awakened, his fractionally-closed eyes and ridiculously infinitesimal slouch are the only visible signs of even such a relatively simple, straightforward human feeling as sleepiness.

His surroundings are much worse. Byrne's unbelievably crisp, hospital-cornered style makes the supposedly sloppy room (commented on on the following page) look like a sterile stage set covered with incredibly unconvincing-looking clutter. The condescendingly crude imitations of motel-room-style schlock art (moppets clutching musical instruments, a garish scene of a matador and bull) hanging on the bedroom walls in the background stick out like sore thumbs amid the pristine disarray of improbably clean-cut objects throughout the rest of the room.

The situation improves somewhat three pages later, when we finally get out of the Collins home and into the outside world. After all, although we can legitimately expect a character's own home to reflect his personality and mood, we generally do not expect this of a public or outdoor setting (unless the story is by someone who specializes in such atmospheric effects, like Eisner himself or Frank Miller). But by the time the scene shifts for the first time, the damage has already been done.

"Stained Glass Scarlet" fares somewhat better in this regard. Although Bill Sienkiewicz's art is tiresomely derivative, at least he does seem to be able to produce some sort of shadows when they are required, even if they—and the occasional accompanying



zip-a-tone splattered across the character's faces to indicate deep thought—are borrowed from Neal Adams and his more established imitators. Despite the excessively long-drawn-out and somewhat over-melodramatic prose of Doug Moench's captions, the first three and a half pages of this story (which center around the secretive Stained Glass Scarlet, a mystery woman out of a 1940s *film noir* who lives in an abandoned church with a cat evocatively named Grey Gummitch) are actually rather effective as a semi-Eisnerian pastiche of a genre as faded and timeworn as Scarlet's treasured photograph album. Unfortunately, the story falls apart as soon as Moench remembers to insert a scene featuring one of the uniformly uninspired multiple personas of Moon Knight—a thoroughly hollow, gimmicky character if ever there was one—especially since this time he is unwise enough to introduce a heartbroken moment of tribute to John Lennon as well.

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And now, just for comic relief, let's look at something which even I will admit is undoubtedly pure coincidence, not the start of a new trend (at least, I certainly hope not)—the strange case of not one, but two, heroines battling villains with housewifely weapons in one year. I refer, of course, to "The Yoga Rednecks" in *HONKYTONK SUE* #4 (story and art by Bob "Boze" Bell; published sometime in Spring 1981) and "*Double Jeopardy*" (the "twin heroines" Captain Universe story) in *MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #10* (Jan. 1981; written by Bill Mantlo and drawn by Steve Ditko).

In "*Double Jeopardy*," the cosmic unipower of Captain Universe is granted to two people at once for the first time. Unfortunately, as has been mentioned elsewhere, this is also the first—and so far only—time the unipower has been granted to a woman, which tends to create the impression that in the eyes of whoever is in charge of these things, it takes two female Captain Universes to equal one male.

The plot and characterization of the story itself do little to dispell this lingering cloud of sexism. One of the identical twin sisters who become Captain Universe is Clare Dodgson, a knee-jerk "womens libber" private eye who responds to her district attorney brother-in-law's remark that his wife Ann is making a special dinner to celebrate the successful conclusion of an important trial with the crack, "Is *that* [i.e., a dinner] all my sister can contribute to our war on crime?!" (p.3). Although Clare later repents of this snide comment, she continues to engage in thought-balloon reflections like, "I...see the life [Ann] has built—the happy home, two beautiful kids...as a *trap* enticing her—keeping her from a career!" (p.5)—as if all the labor—and satisfaction—involved in taking care of a large house and two young children are automatically worthless compared to anything Ann (who apparently lacks the advanced training and/or work experience she would need to get anything more than the most routine and unchallenging paying job) might do outside the home in exchange for a weekly paycheck.

Ann herself is portrayed in an equally stereotyped manner. Even as she courageously rushes back to help her twin fight off the gangland hit men who had been holding Ann and her children prisoner till moments before (not exactly the kind of behavior one would expect from someone whom the script keeps insisting considers ring around the collar more her speed), Ann thinks anxiously, "No time to warn Clare [of the thug aiming a gun at her back]—I've got to act! B-but I'm just a housewife! What

can I possibly...?" (p.10). It is at this moment, as Ann reaches for a container of aerosol window-cleaner to hurl at the menacing gunman, that the unipower suddenly bathes both sisters in a force field of dazzling light, transforming them into twin Captain Universes. As the half-blinded gangster continues to aim in the general direction of the brilliantly-glowing Clare, the now-unipowered Ann desperately sprays window-cleaner at him—and it comes out as a stream of glittering particles which "surround the would-be hitman—encasing him in an impenetrable energy cocoon!" (p.11).

This initial incident arises in a spur-of-the-moment manner which succeeds in being both dramatically effective and convincingly plausible (though one does wonder why someone has hung up on housekeeping as Ann evidently is would leave an aerosol can conveniently standing around in the living room in the first place when she was expecting company for diner). However, when the twin Captain Universes actively pursue the gang which has apparently kidnapped Ann's husband, violently confronting them in two successive hideouts, the homebody heroine's obsessive housewifely *shtick* soon becomes a tedious and unamusing running gag. Attacked by an angry crook, Ann uses her unipower to make him slip on floor wax and slide across the room, then uses a mop as an improvised strait-jacket (you'll just have to look at the illustration—this has to be seen to be believed) and finally "hangs him out to dry" (p. 17). When another, rather grubbily-attired thug rushes at her, Ann trills, "My, now I know why they call them *sweat*suits. You ought to let me launder it for you," and, with a touch of her finger and a flex of the unipower, soaks the crook's clothes in so much starch that "suddenly [he's] stiff as a board!" "Despite my super-powers, I can't help thinking and acting like an ordinary housewife," the tidy-minded twin thinks complacently, "So much dust! I'll just whip up a 'white tornado' of my own and blow it all away!" This, of course surrounds the gangasters with a blinding, choking cloud of dust particles (p. 18).

I could go on—Mantlo does, unfortunately—but it should already be obvious that this praticular Captain Universe acts more like a demented refugee from a detergent commercial than a senseible (or even sane) superheroine. Not to mention the fact that her archly cute attempts at humor prove yet again that Bill Mantlo is the last peron in the world who should ever by entrusted with any strip intended to be funny (Howard the much-dumped-on Duck, take note).

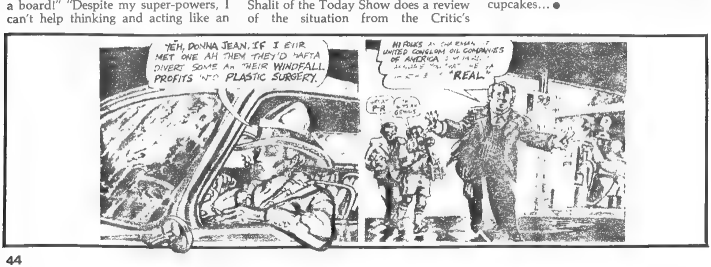
The "*HONKYTONK SUE*" story provides a vivid contrast to the doubly-disappointing "*Double Jeopardy*" in both these respects. Although *HONKYTONK SUE* has certainly had its share of would-be humorous stories that simply fall flat because of ineptly-executed humor or just plain questionable taste (one of them in this very issue), any tale in which "*THE Yoga Rednecks*" of the title go around uttering words of wisdom like, "Don't trust anyone over educated" and grunting ritual greetings such as, "Keep on truckin', oh karmic cousin" definitely has something going for it. Honkytonk Sue, "the prettiest [not to mention toughest] cowgirl in the world," becomes involved with this bizarre band of desperadoes when the Yoga Rednecks decide, "We're guna makuh media event outah kidnappin' sum innuh-cent bystanders" (p. 12)—Sue and her sidekick Donna Jean. The Redneck's goal: "to liberate wimin from liberation" (p. 15).

"The Yoga Rednecks get their first media splash at 8:38 a.m. when Gene Shalit of the Today Show does a review of the situation from the Critic's corner..." This caption introduces a one-panel scene of Shalit gabbling away in a hilarious parody of his usual heavy-handedly pun-laden patter: "...the hostages are *captivating*, and are *bound* to be *held over* by *unpopular demands*..." (p. 15).

Beseiged by media attention and invitations to appear on talk shows, the Yoga Rednecks' leader, the Rev. Merle, goes one step too far: he announces, "...and now the wimin hostages will *enjoy* household chores..." "You could ah talked *all day* and not sed *thet*," Honkytonk Sue mutters ominously (p. 16).

"The Yoga Rednecks begin by attempting to make Sue washes on nationwide TV. They don't get far...Sue quickly turns a container of Liquid Joy into a weapon," squirting it in the Rev. Merle's eyes and causing him to drop his gun and gasp, "Aarrghl! It's new and improved!!" "Feel th' diffrence," Sue retorts, completing the commercial slogan, then grabs her captors sacred "adjustable diaper-head cap" and threatens to run it through a blender. "...of course Merle and his cult surrender immediately." As they explain, "Them caps cost 10 bucks a piece" (p. 17).

There's not much left for me to say about anything after that. So no, at long last, I will you with one final glimpse of the ultimate 1981 comic, in which the worst nightmares of a young woman struggling against the oppressive influence of a dictatorial father come true when she is forced to use Windex and a vacuum cleaner to fight off a bored super-villain who attempts to rape her in a dark alley full of chiaroscuro shadows, while unsuspecting passers-by unaware of their own incredible powers stroll meekly by outside, eating Hostess cupcakes... ●



YEAR IN REVIEW 1981

by Peter Sanderson, Jr.

"Miller's Thrillers"

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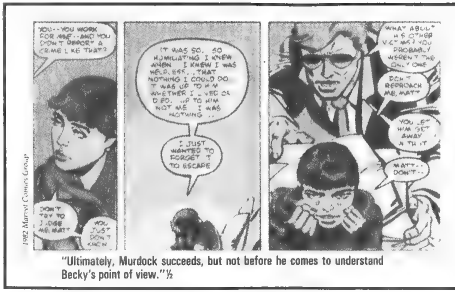
The most significant artistic development in mainstream comic books in 1981 was the emergence of *DAREDEVIL* as one of the foremost books in the current field since its artist, Frank Miller, took over as its writer as well. This magazine, chronicling the exploits of blind lawyer Matt Murdock—whose heightened other senses allow him to function as a costumed crimefighter—had been in a slump ever since the end of the collaboration on the series by its creator Stan Lee and its long-time artist Gene Colan over a decade ago. *DAREDEVIL* is very different now than it was during the Lee-Colan tenure. (Indeed, it is interesting that today's three fan-favorite contemporary mainstream series—*DAREDEVIL*, *X-MEN*, and *TEEN TITANS*—have all evolved into almost wholly different series than what they were in the 1960s, while retaining their essential basic concepts.) The Lee-Colan *DAREDEVIL* tales were escapist delights, depicts a witty, fast-talking and acrobatic hero performing spectacular feats in the face of seemingly impossible odds. Daredevil truly lived up to his name. Miller's Daredevil is no longer a verbal wit, and his stories are not built around stunts, but those incredible acrobatic feats are still there: in issue #178, for example, Daredevil nonchalantly jumps out a skyscraper window, plunges past astounded office workers watching on lower floors, and then swings in through another window. Daredevil's sheer sense of joy is still there too, as portrayed in the opening pages of #170. Smiling broadly, the hero races up the span of the Canal St. Bridge in New York City, radiating an optimism and confidence that inspires a passerby. "He makes an old guy like myself feel a whole lot safer," the observer comments. "City can be a rough place." Indeed it can in Miller's *DAREDEVIL*, both due to the power of crime and to personal emotional crises.

Throughout Miller's *DAREDEVIL* run the themes of the double and the divided self. These are certainly familiar themes in literature, such as the works of Poe and Conrad, and involve the portrayal of two distinct aspects of a personality within the same character, or, symbolically, each within a different character. Super-hero comics make use of this thematic material continually, most noticeably through the device of the secret identity: milquetoast Clark Kent is the same person as Superman. The Jekyll/Hyde syndrome is a disturbing variation on this double motif: hence, milquetoast Bruce Banner is the same person as the savage Hulk, and benevolent Jean Grey can be turned into the malevolent Dark Phoenix. The theme also emerges through the device of rivals who have a great deal in common but who find themselves in conflict with each other. Sometimes this rivalry is cast as a sibling relationship, as with Thor and Loki or Black Bolt and Maximus, and other times not, as with Reed Richards and Dr. Doom. Steve Englehart's Batman was nearly explicitly a representative of the Freudian ego attempting to restrain the destructive id incarnated in the Joker, and finally succeeding with the help of a superego-like lightning bolt from the heavens that submerged the Joker-id in water, a frequent symbol of the subconscious. How often, too, have there been stories that pit the hero against an enemy who has copies his identity, as with the Flash and the Reverse-Flash, or Captain America and his 1950s imitator, or that turn the hero temporarily evil, thereby turning him into his own opposite?

"Ladykiller" (*DAREDEVIL #173*) treats the double theme in ways comparable to those in two of Alfred Hitchcock's films, *THE WRONG MAN*, in which an honest citizen is mistaken by witnesses for a thief who is nearly his exact lookalike, and *STRANGERS ON A TRAIN*, in which an acquaintance of the protagonists fulfills the latter's repressed desire to get rid of his wife. Melvin Potter, formerly Daredevil's arch-enemy the Gladiator, has been mistaken for the sadistic Ladykiller, who not only looks like Potter but wears a costume resembling the Gladiator's. There is a significant difference between their costumes, however: the Gladiator's had a look of nobility to it, whereas Ladykiller's death's-head mask projects

an aura of morbidity, and the great profusion of spikes on his costume (along with the chain motif at his bar hangout) directly point to his sexual proclivities. The Gladiator was a murderer many times over, but Ladykiller is far worse, wreaking havoc for pleasure, and combining sexual perversity with his violence: Ladykiller's victims are women, and it is obvious that the story is an attempt to deal with the subject of rape within the strictures of the Comics Code. Ladykiller is as brutal as the Gladiator was, and therefore virtually everyone believes Potter to be responsible for Ladykiller's crimes. Why not? Potter himself tells Matt Murdock of his savage urges: "I been sitting in that courtroom, listening to them say those things about me, feeling my guts churn up, wanting to rip them all to pieces..." Potter's friend Betsy characterizes him as "a lonely, confused *child* inside," and even in this regard there is a connection between him and Ladykiller, who is something of a demon-child in adult form: Ladykiller's first words to Betsy (interestingly enough, he is made to attack the woman Potter regards as his closest friend) are "Wanna play?" Ladykiller is like an even worse version of Potter's old evil self come to life.


...YOU WORK FOR HIM--AND YOU DON'T BELIEVE A CRIMELIKE THAT'S
IT WAS SO... SO HUMILIATING. I KNEW WHEN I KNEW I WAS NO GOOD. I HAD TO DO SOMETHING. I COULD DO IT WAS UP TO ME. AND THERE I WAS OH, GOD... UP TO HIM NOT ME. I WAS NOTHING
I JUST WANTED TO FORGET TO ESCAPE
DON'T TRY TO HELP ME, MATT
YOU JUST DON'T KNOW
WHAT ABOUT HIS OTHER VICTIMS? YOU PROBABLY HAVEN'T THOUGHT ONCE ABOUT THEM
BUT APPROACH ME, MATT?
YOU'RE NOT GET AWAY WITH IT!
MATT... DON'T...
1992 Marvel Comics Group
"Ultimately, Murdock succeeds, but not before he comes to understand Becky's point of view."½

Long ago in the very first Gladiator story (*DAREDEVIL #18*) Potter displayed his schizoid obsession with his costume: by donning an awesome enough costume, he believed, he could become a greater, more powerful man than his everyday self. This obsession returns in his climactic scenes in "*Ladykiller*." Driven by his hatred for those who blame him for his evil double's crimes, Potter grimly stares at the Gladiator's helmet. "I'm the Gladiator! The Gladiator!...When I'm wearing my armor, I'm unbeatable, I'm..." He breaks off, and still staring at the helmet he holds, his features soften and sadden. A shot of the helmet makes it look empty and skull-like, surrounded by bleak blackness, as if to become the Gladiator again would be for Potter to consign himself to spiritual death. Potter sadly tosses the helmet far away; when he is the Gladiator, "I'm all alone." In extreme long shot, which increases the pathos by making this huge man seem tiny and helpless, he kneels at Murdock's feet, his head buried in his hands, pleading "Help me...please."

At that moment Potter has once and for all rejected the Gladiator part of his personality, and so it is dramatically right that shortly thereafter Daredevil captures Ladykiller. Moreover, Murdock's secretary Becky, who was crippled by Ladykiller years before, decides to testify against him, thereby ensuring his conviction, when she looks at a picture of Potter. She apparently no longer mistakenly sees him as her tormentor, but probably as a fellow victim of Ladykiller's like herself, whom she must help. Potter's success in purging himself of his Gladiator persona is made clear in the next issue, when, even once again garbed in his Gladiator armor, he is unable to defend himself against the ninja trying to kill him. Daredevil observes that Potter has "finally destroyed his killer instincts." In passing, by the way, it is worth noting Ladykiller's panic when Daredevil unmasks him: apparently Ladykiller may have been as psychologically dependent on his costume for a sense of self as the Gladiator was.

There is another, unexpected use of double imagery in the "*Ladykiller*" story as well. Murdock must convince Becky that it is her duty to society to report the attack once made upon her and to testify against Ladykiller despite her anguish when she thinks about all of it. Ultimately Murdock succeeds, but not before he comes to understand Becky's point of view. Overpowered by Ladykiller and other thugs, Daredevil feels helpless as he never has before, and realizes that Becky must have felt the same way when she was victimized. But Daredevil finds the personal strength, literally and figuratively, to fight off and defeat his assailants, just as at the very end of the story, Becky summons up the moral courage to tell her tale to the police.

There is another double for Potter, another huge, dangerous man who is a "lonely child" inside and whose rage is soothed by a kind woman. But this man takes a very different path than Potter did. This is the Kingpin, the master villain of Miller's *DAREDEVIL* stories, a character he has transformed from the ludicrous super-villain of *SPIDER-MAN* adventures into a ruthless behind-the-scenes manipulator, utterly credible as the boss of New York organized crime, and a man of psychological complexity as well. Like Potter, the Kingpin is another case of the divided self. Miller has finally given this character a real name: when we first encounter him in "*The Kingpin Must Die*" (*DAREDEVIL #170*), he is Wilson Fisk, Japan-based dealer in spices. "There is no Kingpin," Fisk declares. He tells his wife, "My violent days are over, dearest Vanessa. Through our love, I have been redeemed." But whereas Potter has expunged the beast within him, Fisk has clearly not. He tells Vanessa he is redeemed right after he has roughed up a man who referred to him as the Kingpin; Fisk explains to her that the man dislocated his shoulder during an exercise session. Unless we are to believe that Vanessa is not an intelligent woman, it would seem that she is allowing herself to believe in her husband's total reformation despite any evidence to the contrary. As she presses him to turn his files on his past criminal connections over to the law, Fisk grimaces significantly, and his choice of language—"informer," "stool pigeon," "betray"—blatantly exposes his revulsion at thus taking the final step away from his life of crime.

Fisk is deluding himself as well. As he beats the man who called him the Kingpin, he insists that he is now "a quiet, gentle man." Later, in issue #171, after Vanessa has been kidnapped by the

"We see the Kingpin from Lynch's point of view: the Kingpin is like a great unstoppable stone juggernaut...blackness blotting out the lower portion of his face, rendering it more inhuman...The lonely child has turned into a savage beast before our eyes."

former cohorts which his files will expose, Fisk thunders that "I don't want to rule the mobs again! I don't want anything...except Vanessa!" Yet after he apparent demise Fisk once more becomes the Kingpin, moving swiftly to recapture total control of New York's organized crime, never betraying any regret over what he is doing, but rather, seemingly comfortable to be in his own element. At Melvin Potter's moments of crisis, he proved himself by not becoming the Gladiator. Vanessa's seeming death was Fisk's trial by fire, and he failed the test.

But it would be very wrong to consider Fisk to be merely a self-deceiving hypocrite. Although he was wrong in thinking he had absolved himself of the Kingpin part of his personality, he had succeeded in repressing it, as indeed he wanted to do. In #173 he explains that "My life was nothing but a lonely struggle for power. Vanessa warmed me. Showed me love...." After overpowering her captors in #172, his face lights up with joy and he comes towards her, his words and hopes exuberantly pouring from him: "They are helpless, beloved, but I did not kill them! I knew you wouldn't want me to! It's over, my love! We can...leave this madness forever behind us...live out our lives in peace! It's finally over..." The impression created is that of a child, long separated from his mother, finally being reunited with her after much hardship, and beaming with pride that he has obeyed the rules she set down for him. When Fisk discovers a few pages later that she has apparently been killed, there is a look of childlike despondency in his eyes, and he is left in a daze, able only to mutter that he will "make them pay," like a little boy vowing to get even. But the Kingpin is far more dangerous than that. By the next issue he has determined that his henchman Lynch was behind Vanessa's seeming murder. In an astonishing sequence the silent, impassive Kingpin suddenly erupts in fury and rams Lynch's head against a table. Insane rage flames in the Kingpin's eyes; his enormous hand grips Lynch's mouth and neck; Miller draws a coffin-like shape around the doomed henchmen's head. Then the Kingpin's face looks softer, he seems sad and in need of comfort as for a moment he remembers what Vanessa meant to him. The spell breaks. "And you took her from me..." He hits Lynch. "My one moment of joy..." He hits him again. "My one brief instant of humanity." But there is no humanity in the Kingpin any more. We see the Kingpin from Lynch's point of view: the Kingpin is like a great unstoppable stone juggernaut, his powerful arms and fists raised upwards, about to strike, blackness blotting out the lower portion of his face, rendering it more inhuman, harsh black and glaring white in the background. Lynch raises a supplicating hand upward to no avail; in the next panel the Kingpin thrusts his immense fists downward, delivering the lethal blow; small pieces of wood fly upward from the force of impact. The lonely child has turned into a savage beast before our eyes. Just as the amnesiac Vanessa now mindlessly wanders the underground sewers, her existence unknown to anyone, piteously seeking nourishment, so too the side of Wilson Fisk she symbolizes, the side capable of redemption, lies buried, without sustenance, within the mind of the Kingpin.

Surely, you might think, only a villain like the Kingpin could look so demoniac. Yet after Daredevil gains the upper hand in his battle with Ladykiller, Miller gives us a close-up of our hero with gritted teeth and an evil furrow to his brow. It is no wonder that Ladykiller panics: it is now Daredevil who looks satanic, not himself. There are, it appears, two sides to Daredevil as well.

Miller has described Daredevil as "probably the most Christian of super-heroes, in that he loves his enemies, to some degree" (*COMICS FEATURE #14*). It is this Christian sense of love that underlies his helping the Gladiator to reform. In issue #170 Daredevil pursues an assassin named Bruno, who had just tried to kill him and two other people, and uses physical force in trying to stop him. Yet after Daredevil watches Bruno die in trying to get away, he mourns for him, asking "Was it worth it, Bruno? Whatever they offered you, how can it pay for this?" It is Daredevil's sense of the value of life that prevents him from leaving his foe Bullseye to die on the subway tracks in #169. As Miller has noted in interviews, Daredevil's first concern is not with punishing criminals, as the Batman's appears to be. Instead, as Daredevil states himself when given the choice of following Ladykiller or helping his latest targets, "my first duty is to his victims." Daredevil, Miller has said, is "a total idealist and a real nice guy in a real ugly world."

Yet at the same time Miller's narrator tell us in issue #173 that Daredevil "is a scarlet fury, questioning, pleading, pummelling every two-bit informant for a single clue that will bring him closer to his prey... He is a relentless, wrathful *demon* that haunts every garbage-strewn alleyway—every grimy waterfront saloon—every place small and dark enough to hide evil men." The narrator speaks of Daredevil's "rage" and "his terrible scourge." On confronting Bullseye in issue #172, Daredevil refers back to the incident on the subway tracks in #169, and tells Bullseye he wanted the train to hit him. (Daredevil's head is tipped upward, and he looks sorrowful, as if he was confessing to a great wrong, as indeed he is. The Christian motif thus is present here as well.) Then Daredevil turns grim, and clenches his fist: "I wanted to hear your bones splinter beneath its wheels. I wanted to hear you scream—and die." Looking enraged, but at the same time controlling himself, Daredevil declares that "it hurts" him

that he saved Bullseye only to learn that the villain has now killed again, and that "Now, I'm going to share that hurt with you." With that, Daredevil and Bullseye commence a ferocious battle.

Daredevil's "love" for his enemies is not, therefore, necessarily his natural response to them. Superman has long been characterized by his unwillingness to let anyone come to harm, much less to let anyone die, but rarely do we see signs that Superman is capable of hatred. Daredevil, on the other hand, is. He does not shrink from using harsh force in his war on crime, and when he spares his enemies from death or unnecessary brutality, he does so not necessarily from a reflex-like response, but often from a very conscious decision not to let his hatred overwhelm his moral code. At the conclusion of the hate-filled fight between Daredevil and Bullseye in #172, the Kingpin says he will allow Daredevil to kill his now defeated foe. Daredevil does not.

Bullseye, who looks very much like his foe when they are in costume, is Daredevil's evil double. The opposition between the two is that of a preserver of life and a bringer of death, of a man motivated by love of humanity and a mercenary who coldly treats people's lives as matter of business, between morality and amorality, between sanity and insanity, and between the good side of man and his dark side. Bullseye is haunted by Daredevil's image, as seen in issue #169, just as Daredevil feels guilty responsibility for Bullseye's crimes. The final images of their battle in #172 sum up their relationship: each with his hands gripped around the other's throat.

Daredevil has another double and opposite as well: Elektra. They have much in common: both were once rather solitary college students who fell passionately in love. Both their fathers fells victim to violence, but whereas Daredevil's was killed by criminals, Elektra's was accidentally shot dead by the police. Why the latter act would cause a seemingly normal woman to turn into a cold-blooded hired killer, who bereaves other of their loved ones as she was herself bereaved, has yet to be adequately explained. Nevertheless, Daredevil and Elektra find themselves following similar but opposite paths, each having become a costumed adventurer, but one fighting on behalf of the law and life, and the other acting in amoral opposition to both. The opening pages of *DAREDEVIL #178* draw a stark contrast between the two: Daredevil, leaping through open air in bright sunshine, expresses his love for the city, but the narrator informs us that Elektra, pictured stalking through the city in blackest night, hates it.

Miller says that he places Daredevil in situations that test his idealism. It should be observed that he also places Elektra in situations that test her amorality. Is she Daredevil's ally, his rival, his lover still, or his killer? How will she react to the moral example he sets for her? Miller's solo adventure for Elektra in a recent *BIZARRE ADVENTURES* puts her in alliance with a very great evil, and shocks her into abandoning her moral insensitivity enough to rebel against him. But she ends by killing her evil employer in the story, whereas Daredevil holds himself back from crossing the line into murder.

There is a final double for Daredevil: his "own private devil," the ghastly monstrosity he confronts in a vision in issue #177, which embodies his hidden fears and resentments. The logic behind this story is faulty. Daredevil has lost the radar sense that serves as his substitute for sight, and he cannot regain it unless he triumphs over this inner "devil," and yet the latter has never handicapped his fighting ability before, nor does this veteran crimefighter's self-abasement before his actively unpleasant "teacher" Stick, who beats him with a real stick as a villainous Dickensian schoolmaster might, make any sense. Nevertheless, the story shows there is a child remaining inside the adult Daredevil, who still feels the pain inflicted by bullies' taunts, who still feels rage at the fate that blinded him, who still resents his father's precepts yet feels guilty over violating them, and anguished by his murder. But finally, "I'm not scared. And I'm not angry. Not any more. And that's why I can kill you," and with that Daredevil destroys the "devil" within him. Stick warned him that "You gotta face the enemies in your head... They can kill you," and issues before, Matt advised Becky not to let her emotions "cripple" her. These are the rules that *DAREDEVIL*'s central characters must obey. Daredevil, Becky and Potter pass their tests; Elektra (so far, anyway) and the Kingpin ultimately do not. Miller's comic relief crooks Turk and Grotto provide comedic examples of the same theme: no matter how many times they are humiliatingly defeated, they never learn and come back for more, remaining trapped in an ironic cycle.

The perennial comment made on Miller's art is that it is cinematic, but perhaps it is not well understood how far the resemblance between one of his *DAREDEVIL* stories and a film goes. Even his titles are presented like those of movies: #170's is "*Stan Lee Presents: The Kingpin Must Die, Starring Daredevil, The Man Without Fear,*" printed on a billboard! Miller may use montage (as in #172, where we see shots of different scenes of gangland activity as the Kingpin describes them), or keep the "camera" in a fixed position while the subject moves (as in #170, where over

YOU THOUGHT THAT SINKING MY SHIP WOULD STOP ME, MONSTER.
YOU THOUGHT YOU WERE SAFE.
ALL THE DEMONS OF HELL COULDN'T KEEP ME FROM YOU, MONSTER.
I WILL HEAR YOU SCREAM.

"Miller's solo adventure for Elektra...puts her in alliance with a very great evil, and shocks her into abandoning her moral insensitivity enough to rebel against him."

the course of several panels Daredevil falls into view, he grabs hold of a flag on a flagpole he passes, which then tears, and he finally falls out of the frame, leaving only his hands in sight), or "dolly in" for an ever-more-extreme close-up (as with the Kingpin after the building's collapse in #172), or simply create a beautiful, "posed" tableau (the splash page of Elektra in #175). He has a filmmaker's eye for locations (the glittering skyscrapers and the dank saloons), for lighting (the pitch blackness of the interiors of mob leaders' headquarters, sometimes lit solely by bars of light from the gaps in Venetian blinds), for epic spectacle (the aforementioined building collapse), for stunning point-of-view shots (the huge vertiginous shot when Daredevil is kicked out a skyscraper window in #170), or for dramatic bits of visual business (Bullseye aiming a gun at the back of the calm Kingpin's head, and then, after listening to him, lighting the Kingpin's cigarette on request a moment later, in #172). There are "special effects," such as the hallucinatory scenes in #178 and the strobe-like after-images of Daredevil in fight scenes that convey his speed. There are also bravura "acting" scenes, like Becky's movement toward an emotional outburst at Matt in #173, in which through "camera" placement and skillful depiction of facial expressions and body movement, Miller brings a character's emotions to life. Cinematic effects also arise from Miller's taking advantage of the fact that he is both writer and artist to render important story elements wholly in visual terms. Hence he will present exciting fight scenes in which not a word is spoken, or convey a character's feelings and thoughts powerfully simply through a silent close-up. In #178 Elektra speaks not a word, yet the pictures of her convey much of what she is thinking, while casting an intriguing air of mystery over the rest.

In summary, then, in a world of mainstream comics that seem ever more like eath other, it is a great pleasure to see a series as thematically and artistically strong and individualized as Miller's *DAREDEVIL*. Comics can be a dull place. Miller's *DAREDEVIL* makes an old jaded reader like myself feel a whole lot better. ●

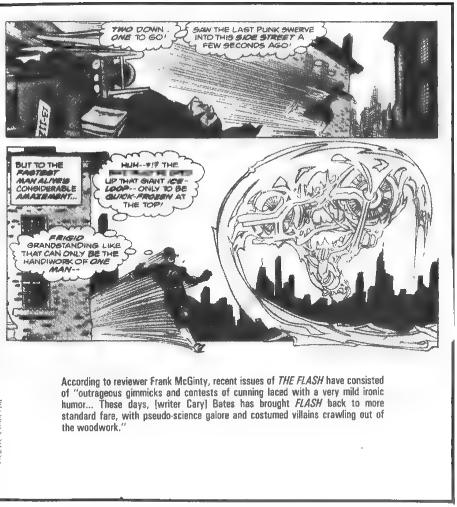
A reader once described *THE FLASH* as "utter nonsense presented with a straight face"; another, younger, fan explained he liked the book because "it doesn't have too much love or too much hatred...*FLASH* comics are on the level." Both descriptions strike pretty close to home. In today's market, *THE FLASH* is an oddity: though recently updated, in some ways it remains a holdover from a bygone era. Mind you, I'm not complaining. The last year's worth of *FLASH* demonstrates that some comics can maintain, and even improve upon, the virtues of the good old days.

The "classic" (pre-1968) *FLASH*, of course, always had a distinctive approach, even in the early 1960s. Series writer John Broome usually imparted a more serious tone to *GREEN LANTERN* than he did to *FLASH*, and even Gardner Fox, the author of suspenseful landmarks like *"Vengeance of the Immortal Villain"* (and creator or the original Flash) lightened his usually somber tone in the pages of this magazine. True, the book had more than its share of deadpan save-the-universe plots and patently unconvincing science fiction gimmicks. One can't help feeling, however, that Broome, well before anyone had tried to define "camp," was having a bit of tongue-in-cheek fun with his hero. Here was a character, who, at one time or another, was turned into an overweight hulk, a puppet, a mirror, and a human boomerang, whose antagonists all frequented the same off-the-rack costume shop and competed for points in criminal popularity polls. Not exactly

life-and-death material. Conflict in *THE FLASH* never descended to direct physical brutality; rather, it was presented as a series of fantastic speed duels and battles of wits won not by brainpower *per se*, but often by trickery and guile. An appropriate method, this, for a character who must in some respect be counted a descendant of the messenger of the gods and patron of thieves, Hermes, himself a slippery character.

Outrageous gimmicks and contests of cunning laced with a very mild ironic humor: this is a mix explained easily enough. However, it has, in laster years, proven a balancing act too delicate for many to manage. On the evidence of *"The Pied Piper's Paradox Peril"* (*FLASH #193*, January, 1981), at any rate, it seems beyond the reach of Gerry Conway. Mr. Conway based his script on an old joke, and attained comparable results, namely, a half-hearted laugh and mild annoyance that anyone should perpetrate such an ancient gag. Conway's Flash/Firestorm team-up in the same issue was quite entertaining, but it illustrates the point: though a good enough story, even one with a degree of genuine humor, there is nothing about *"The Deadliest Man Alive"* that marks it as a particular kind of adventure story. And it may be that, with the example of Marvel Comics before them, many people no longer have any idea that specific features might require a specific approach.

It has remained to Cary Bates to demonstrate an understanding of what distinguished *THE FLASH* from other hero comics. Mr. Bates has now served a full decade as writer-in-residence on this book and, while the understanding why may have been there all along, he has not always communicated this. Bates' early *FLASH* scripts (with one or two exceptions) strike me as a cold imitation of Broome, in which the gimmicks were applied mechanically and the outcome of the story obvious from the very first pages. Worse, these formula adventures were completely unadorned by much wit or by any hint of a personal life for the protagonist. In the middle 1960s, the Schwartz stable was placing more emphasis on human interest, but Bates ignored this development and took the feature back to the dreary days of 1959. Barry Allen never seemed to go to work, and the supporting cast, more often than not, consisted solely of Iris, reduced to a housewifely shadow of her formerly spunky self. After tedium like that the issues edited by Ross Andru (who turned the feature into an extended cliffhanger) were welcome relief,


TWO DOWN, ONE TO GO!
SAW THE LAST PUNK SWERVE INTO THIS SIDE STREET A FEW SECONDS AGO!
BUT TO THE FASTEST MAN ALIVE'S CONSIDERABLE AMUSEMENT...
HUM...? IF THE [illegible] UP THAT GIANT ICE-LOOP--ONLY TO BE QUICK-FROZEN AT THE TOP!
GRANDSTANDING LIKE THAT CAN ONLY BE THE HANDIWORK OF ONE MAN--

According to reviewer Frank McGinty, recent issues of *THE FLASH* have consisted of "outrageous gimmicks and contests of cunning laced with a very mild ironic humor... These days, [writer Cary] Bates has brought *FLASH* back to more standard fare, with pseudo-science galore and costumed villains crawling out of the woodwork."

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however strange.

These days, Mr. Bates has brought *FLASH* back to more standard fare, with pseudo-science galore and costumed villains crawling out of the woodwork. Now, however, a more substantial supporting cast has been established: the insufferable Captain Frye and the boorish Detective Curtis (the latter a holdover from the Andru days) are the best of the bunch, but the simple act of giving Barry Allen neighbors and co-workers has had immediately beneficial results. In these days of super-heroic over-population, it's nice to read a comic book in which every second character does not have a dual identity or preposterous powers. Greater emphasis on human interest (as opposed to soap opera or psychodrama) makes the customary hero vs. villain conflict seem more like a story and less like a collecion of gimmicks, and makes possible a story on the order of *"The Man Who Was Cursed to the Bone"* (#296, April). This latter effort featured no villains, super or otherwise, though it did contain some action and a problem to be solved, and is a perfect example of the mild pleasure—an amalgam of amusement, suspense and sentiment—that the book offers. It's difficult to imagine any super-character taking time out to do something so basic as to help find a cure for a crippling disease, but there are Flash and Elongated Man doing it. The character is unique in another way, too, as he is the only major super-hero I can think of whose parents have not been murdered by criminals or otherwise removed from the scene. Bates took advantage of this in an extended sub-plot, and while the climax was bizarre, to say the least (Dr. Allen's body was possessed by the long-dead Top), the story-line did generate some fine, realistic situations. The scenes involving Mrs. Allen's lengthy recuperation dramatized very well the strains placed on a family when one of its members is hospitalized for an extended period. It's developments such as these that make the current *FLASH* in some respects actually superior to its "classic" period.

Naturally enough, the highlight of the year was the 300th anniversary issue. The forty-eight page *"1981: A Flash*

...ANY ONE OF WHOM WOULD TAKE GREAT DELIGHT IN SEEING ME TRAPPED BEHIND THESE BANDAGES, PARALYZED AND UNABLE TO TWITCH A--
SORRY I HAVE THE STRANGEST FEELING I'M NO LONGER ALONE!
HOPE WE'RE NOT DISTURBING YOU, MY BOY! THAT ARMY BRIGADIER OF YOURS-- NOW WHAT WAS HIS NAME...
DR. PETROVU, PROFESSOR!
THANK THE GREEN SOME DAMNLAND FACES AT LAST! MY FATHER-IN-LAW, DEA WEST.. MY NEPHEW WALLY WEST..
AND GOOD OL' DEXTER MYLES, CURATOR OF THE FLASH MUSEUM!
YES, PETROV! ANYWAY, HE SAID YOU'D BE IN THIS MOOD FOR YESTERDAY!
I HEAR THE BANDAGES WILL BE COMING OFF ANY DAY NOW, BARRY!
A MOMENTOUS DAY, ON WHICH I WILL CALL UPON MY ADMINISTRATION TRAINING TO PROVIDE A SUITABLY JOYFUL QUOTE FOR THIS MUCH-AWAITED APPEARANCE!
GOOD GOSH! NOT MY FRIENDS, TOO! THEY'RE BEHAVING AS IF I REALLY HAVE BEEN A PATIENT IN THIS CLINIC FOR WHO KNOWS HOW LONG!
I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY'D WILLFULLY BETRAY ME... BUT WHAT IF THEY'RE BEING CONTROLLED AGAINST THEIR WILL?
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"As I was approaching the conclusion to issue #300, the thought occurred to me that there wasn't enough room left for a satisfactory explanation of some of the loose ends. As it turned out, there wasn't..."

Odyssey" neatly obviated any need for a Flash mini-series (a la *LEGEND OF THE BATMAN*), since it contained a recapitulation of the highlights and low-life of the Scarlet Speedster's career. Unlike most of the mini-series, though, the issue had a riveting new story as well, based on the most striking framing device: Barry Allen, a bed-ridden hospital patient, is told that he has been a paralysis victim for years, and so sought refuge in a fantasy-life modelled on his childhood comic book idol—the Flash! With uncommon deftness, Bates ended each successive chapter with increasingly crushing denials of the Flash's existence, culminating in the appearance of the (deceased) Iris, who confirms that she never married Allen. This story could be viewed as the exception that proves the rule, as Bates rarely writes a story with this kind of suspense, and it is certainly atypical for this feature. The only example in the canon that's comparable—the Andru-edited serial—was easily outpointed by this wonderfully paced story.

In the art department, the series has not been entirely fortunate of late. After the departure of Irv Novick, the feature suffered a series of woebegon fill-ins by "permanent" artists who weren't. Don Heck did a creditable job on the *"Pied Piper"* and *"Gorilla Grodd"* stories (#293-295) as well as several others, but we're only discussing 1981's *"Flash"* comics. To my mind, Heck's pencils are not always well-served by his inking, which is, if anything, too fine; however, he has been the only artist (apart from Gil Kane) to draw the fastest man alive living up to his name. Heck's Flash runs flat out, and works at it: when he runs up the side of a skyscraper, you believe it. Not unexpectedly, Heck's work was overshadowed by the return of the series' original artist, Carmine Infantino. Infantino is important to this feature not simply from a nostalgic point of view, but because he set the tone and style for it. Andru, Novick and Heck have all drawn a substantial number of issues, but none of them has been able to re-fashion the feature in the way that, say Curt Swan re-defined Superman or John Romita recreated Spider-Man. It is doubly unfortunate, then, that nostalgia is almost the only thing Infantino's new issues have to offer. It is good to see the Flash looking and moving like himself (though I can't say the same for Barry Allen), and it is nice to see Carmine's clear, understated sense of design at work. Other than that, the art doesn't bear more than cursory examination: the drawing is frequently bad, and the inker has had no success at rendering Infantino's sketches into solid, recognizable figures. In retrospect, it seems regrettable that Mr. Heck was not kept on for at least a few issues more, thereby allowing Infantino to begin with the extra-length 300th issue. As it stands, the art for that book, even by today's relaxed rules, is not consistently up to professional standards. Issues both before and after that one have been better, but it is to be devoutly wished for that a different inker will be able to impart some form to the book.

Of course, the Flash's problems aren't restricted to the visual side of things. Mr. Bates has improved considerably in the past while, but there are still a few things in his scripts that need ironing out (I am by now accustomed to the wooden dialogue). As I was approaching the conclusion to issue #300, the thought occurred to me that there wasn't enough room left for a satisfactory explanation of some of the loose ends. As it turned out, there wasn't and in *"Flash Odyssey"* there seem to be a couple of holes you could throw a satellite through. Also, the Dr. Allen subplot was left dangling uncomfortably over the anniversary issue, and it would not have been unreasonable for a reader to assume that whoever was masquerading as Barry's father was behind the whole insidious plot. There is still a tendency in this series to treat the villains as convenient ciphers: poor old Captain Cold is assumed guilty of, and presumably imprisoned for, crimes he didn't commit! (#297, May)

The most annoying aspect of Flash stories, though, continues to be the overworked rescue motif. This is usually treated as a device to insert some action every third or fourth page, whether the story development calls for it or not. *"The Fiend the World Forgot"* (#294, February) is the worst offender in this regard: on page six our hero saves a cabin cruiser from a storm (in the middle of the Atlantic?) while en route from Africa, and on pages fifteen and sixteen prevents two window washers from becoming blots on the sidewalk. Both scenes are nothing more than padding, and represent obvious formulation at its worst. Instances such as these may be no more irritating than the popular habit of beginning a story with an action

sequence unrelated to the rest of the story; but if action is a necessity at specific points in the book, surely it can be more successfully integrated than this.

If you're wondering, after all this complaining, why I read *THE FLASH*, it's because of issues like #304 (December). The editorial team ended the year on the best possible note, with a "transformation story" that will join the ranks of those that turned the Flash into a TV cartoon or a slab of sidewalk. Just read along comfortably to page fourteen, turn the centerfold with suspicion and...oh, no! They wouldn't...they couldn't...but they *did*! Yes, they turned the Flash into a blip on a computer game. Unbelievable? Sure, but then, you just have to look at the speedster's costume, his nice guy personality and his improbably situtaitons, to know that he is really the successor to that original Big Red Cheese, Captain Marvel. It's mild-mannered, low-key, and utter nonsense—and it's fun all the way through. ●

YEAR IN REVIEW 1981

by Kurt Busiek

MARVEL COMICS GROUP
60¢ 238
WIN A Columbia TEN SPEED BACK!!
THE WORLD'S GREATEST COMIC MAGAZINE!
Fantastic Four
HONEST! DOCTOR DOOM IS NOT IN THIS MARVEL COMIC!
BUT YOU WILL FIND OUT THE STARTLING SECRET OF FRANKIE RAYE, IN A DRAMATIC DEVELOPMENT IN THE LIFE OF THE THING!

1981 saw the Fantastic Four facing such menaces as the Ebon Seeker, gods on Hondas, and radioactive trilobites, but the man who put the F.F. through the most was John Byrne. His tenure on the book began toward the end of the year, in #232, but his assumption of the role of writer/artist/inker on *FANTASTIC FOUR* when the original concept is so good to begin with. To go Marvel's "premiere" title in the past few years.

John Byrne brought big changes to the *FANTASTIC FOUR*, most of them regressive. With #232, Johnny Storm lost about nine years of growth, Reed Richards lost about forty pounds, and Ben Grimm lost whatever peace of mind he might have gained over the past twenty years, reverting to the potentially-dangerous monster with the hair-trigger temper he used to be (rather than the blunt funny-man he's become in recent years). The stories, too, have attempted to capture that aura of the Lee/Kirby years, eschewing the sophistication that Roy Thomas, George Perez, John Buscema, Gerry Conway, *et al* have brought to the series.

Some fans don't like this change, flaunting as it does the strict continuity that has been part of Marvel's company appeal since the early 1960s. The Fantastic Four, as a collection of individuals, has grown and progressed, and to ignore that growth hurts the series. However, most of that growth has resulted in a toning-down of the characters' personalities. The Thing mellowed out, losing his roughness and irritability. The Torch grew up, losing his youthful brashness. The Invisible Girl gained modern "liberated" sensibilities, losing a lot of her identity as the "frills and feminine foolishness" member of the team. And Mr. Fantastic got married, losing almost his only reason for interacting with the world outside his laboratory. The characters meshed better, lived together more pleasantly, and pretty much got more boring than they used to be. And along with that, the series lost a lot of the vitality and power that made it so good in the first place. Growth alone is not enough, particularly if that growth detracts from the series' appeal. If the series is to change successfully, it must find a new emphasis on which to base its appeal. Recently, the creative teams of both *KA-ZAR* and *DAREDEVIL* have restructured their series so that they seem to have no relation to the way the series started out, and have done it to popular acclaim. In the case of *KA-ZAR* at least, it is a definite improvement, breathing life into a concept that was tiresomely derivative at its outset.

But it would be a shame to find a new focus (even a successful new focus) for *FANTASTIC FOUR* when the original concept is so good to begin with. To go back to

basics with the Fantastic Four is simply to reaffirm the core appeal of the series, and if continuity must yield to quality to accomplish this, then at least it's better to have a good series than a consistent-but-dull one.

And Byrne has certainly made good use of the "back to the basics" approach. Issue #233's *"Mission for a Dead Man,"* for example, is prime Human Torch material, but it would not have worked so well with the older, more sophisticated Torch. Johnny's youthful exuberance and optimism is parallelled with Georgie Munson's corruption, and his irritation at his own mistakes never slows him down. Ultimately, his being a "good boy" is the point of the story, something that would never have come through with the grown-up Torch.

The Thing is the character most affected by the change. In the Byrne issues, he is considerably more violent than previously, but reasons are given, both from a character and a continuity standpoint. In #233, he flies off the handle when Johnny needles him about his most sensitive aspect—his appearance—and in #236, he not only goes through the agony of physical transformation once more, but has had the chance to consummate his love for Alicia Masters and live the life he could have lived if not for his being the Thing. All this would certainly justify a more savage outlook. The idea of the Thing as a heroic-but-potentially dangerous character is more interesting than his being a heroic-but-prone-to-depression—but only if it is handled skillfully. John Byrne has been associated with violent and murderous "heroes" before (in *X-MEN*), and has talked of plans for what seems like rampant violent death in *FANTASTIC FOUR*, both of which would make the new, more violent Thing more suspect (especially since the F.F. has always been a very moral, almost stodgy group).

Byrne has done fairly well with this aspect of the series, showing the F.F.—the Thing especially—to have strong moral sensibilties. Ben is quite upset when he believes that he has killed the elementals (in #232), just as Johnny is horrified at the thought of Ego's antibodies destroying themselves by walking into his flame-wall (in #235). However, Byrne makes mistakes, as when Ego actually dies, due indirectly to the F.F.'s actions, and Ben's only comment is, "That's all that's left? That *guck*? Hot dog! Well, we've had bad guys fall apart on us before, but I guess this is one for Guinness." His callousness, as well as the rest of the F.F.'s uniformly bland reactions to Ego's death, is amazing—considering their usual behavior.

THAT WAS PROBABLY WHY WANDA WAS SO SPOOKED WHEN I LOOKED IN THAT STORE ROOM IN SYNXT. WANT ME NOTICING HER? BRICKED UP THE WINDOW TO HELP ONCE IN SYNXT. WANT ME NOTICING HER?
WANDA IS BEING HELD HOSTAGE NOW, PERHAPS CHANGED. I KNOW THIS DOESN'T BRING GEORGIE BACK, MRS. MUNSON.
THAT'S OKAY, MR. TORCH. HE WAS A BAD BOY, MY GEORGIE. FROM ALL THINGS I'VE HEARD, THINGS WHAT HE DONE, HE DESERVED IT.
WHAT'S YOU MEAN -- YOU MEAN YOU KNEW? ALL ALONG YOU KNEW HE WAS A CROOK AND A MURDERER?
LISTEN, I MAY BE JUST AN IGNORANT OLD SHOP-GRANT LADY, BUT STUPID I AIN'T. I ALWAYS KNOW WHO'D COME TO NO GOOD. A MOTHER ALWAYS KNOWS.
MRS. MUNSON, I--I'M SORRY--I WANTED YOU TO BELIEVE THAT GEORGIE WASN'T A BAD--I MEAN, I WENT THROUGH HELL TRYING TO RECORD OF YOU COULD SEE THAT HE WASN'T--
THAT'S BECAUSE YOU'RE THE KIND OF BOY FROM WHO ANY MOTHER COULD GET PROUD.
BECAUSE YOU ARE A HERO.
AND FOR JOHNNY STORM, THE KID WHOSE THAT WHOLE NIGHTMARE HAD BEEN, FOR A MOMENT, A BIT LESS CHILLING.
"Issue #233...would not have worked so well with the older...Torch."

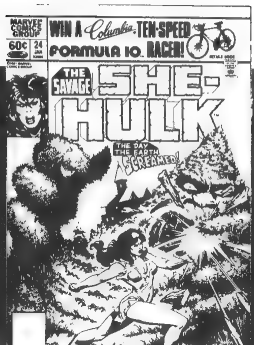
Not everything in *FANTASTIC FOUR* follows the "back to basics" philosophy. Most of the character work has been done on the "colorful" members of the team, the Thing and the Torch, leaving Mr. Fantastic and the Invisible Girl in the background for the most part. Byrne obviously does not want to return to the original characterization of Sue Storm Richards, if for no other reason than that he'd draw considerable flak from feminists among the audience, but aside from having Sue get a new hair-do, he has done very little with her (perhaps because the "other" Sue Richards, the liberated one, does not fit the team image). Rather than consign Sue to the background, however, it might be pointed out that some women, even intelligent, capable ones, choose traditional feminine behavior patterns because they are happy that way. Sue could be brought more into line with her original characterization *and* be presented as a strong, heroic, positive role model. After all, the women's liberation movement does not seek to force women out of the home, but merely to make alternatives possible. It would be nice to have the ultra-cool Black Widows and shrill Ms. Marvels balanced off by some varied female characters—just as macho Ben Grimm is balanced off by the more sensitive Peter Parker. A pronounced variance among male characters exists in the Marvel Universe, so why not extend that courtesy to women?

Sue might have more vitality as a character if more dimension was added to Reed (thus giving her more to react to). In the old days, Reed would come out of the lab to be husband, father, lover, friend...but as time went on he became more and more the scientist and less anything else. Reed certainly needs something; after all, he is not only the head of the F.F. as a super-team, but he also leads them in their other capacity as a family.

Byrne's *F.F.* has been very much the super-team, forgetting the tight relationship that sets them apart from all other super-hero teams, with the exception of issue #236 (which, not so coincidentally, has to be one of the best *"F.F."* stories in many years). Everything came together for *F.F. #236*, but the best part of the story was the opening sequence in Liddleville, in which the F.F. lived happy suburban existences—*albeit* temporarily. The sight of Reed and Sue's married life, Johnny's career as a garage mechanic, and especially Ben's running a bar and grill made the F.F. seem like normal people—a normal family with normal concerns—so when they began acting extraordinary, it was more than just a super-hero story. It was everything the *FANTASTIC FOUR* is supposed to be, and it made a very appropriate twentieth anniversary celebration.

It is worth noting that John Byrne has done very little comics writing previous to this, and that *FANTASTIC FOUR* is his first regular Marvel scripting assignment. He has some writing problems, which he is in the process of working out. *"The Man With the Power" (F.F. #234)* leaps to mind as an example of a good idea presented poorly. As it was written, the story of "Skip" Collins came off as a convenient (if heavy-handed) way to keep the Earth from being destroyed by Ego, and not the whimsical character piece is was meant to be. But throughout, Byrne's writing has been pleasant, craftsmanlike, and quite readable, maintaining the standard of quality that his art has always kept, and whatever problems the *F.F.* now has, as least it's *exciting*—and that's certainly worth a few rough edges.●

YEAR IN REVIEW 1981



by Dennis Perado

Some spin-off characters—whether kids such as Wonder Girl or Kid Flash, women analogues such as Supergirl or Batgirl, or even animal counterparts such as Krypto the Super-Dog—have, through connections with their "mentors," a fighting chance at survival. Other spin-off characters are not so lucky: due to the innate immediate absurdity of their very existence (either through a mismatch of character to analogue type—as with, say, a hypothetical Spider-Dog or Kid Conan—or through the unsuitability of their "mentor" characters to tacitly countenance *any* derivations of themselves), the supposed advantage of sharing part of their name, powers, costume design, appearance, and/or operating grounds with a more established persona becomes detrimental to their acceptance and longevity.

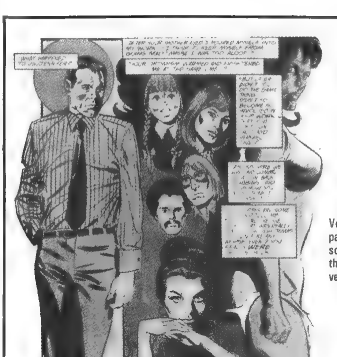
When I first saw the She-Hulk, my reaction was the same as it had been for Spider-Woman, Ms. Marvel, Batgirl, the short-lived lady Flash, etc.: "Won't they ever learn?" Admittedly, Barbara (Batgirl) Gordon has grown on me over the years—as had Supergirl before her—but most of the female spin-offs I remember have lacked any internal direction to their series from start to finish, and have further—through their low sales and usual failure as characters—made things rougher for new-debuting super-heroines. The low sales of the dismal *SPIDER-WOMAN* and *MS. MARVEL* series is used as anargument against giving long-established and unique characters, such as the Scarlet Witch their own series. (Remember when the scuttlebutt from Marvel was that the then-upcoming *MS. MARVEL* book would feature Marvel Girl—with a new super-identity—out on her own?) The exclusively-commercial motivations for starting those series (and their generally hopelessly-muddled executions) is, likewise, somehow overlooked. Spin-off characters tend to earn their keep in licensing, but more often than not, their newsstand allure is lacking.*

And such, ultimately, is the case with *THE SHE-HULK*, whose series has ended after twenty-five monthly issues. The concept of the character is vaguely ludicrous to begin with (and was loosed by Marvel on the world—to capitalize on the Hulk's TV popularity—to prevent some other entrepreneur from doing the same), and, once past the first Stan Lee/John Buscema issue, Marvel did not feel compelled to bolster the series with proven top-selling creative talent. During its second year, *THE SHE-HULK* faltered and died.

I wouldn't want to argue the position that the She-Hulk was *not* one of those unmarketably weird character/analogue mismatches (because I don't think I'd win), but strangely enough, I feel that *THE SHE-HULK* for all of its conceptual limitations, evolved its own style of odd charm—and that that unique feel developed primarily over the past year.

Perhaps the very fact that *THE SHE-HULK*'s concept was so completely commercially focused actually *freed* the creative team (writer David Kraft, artist Mike Vosburg, and editors Jo Duffy and Allen Milgrom) to do weird, experimental stories. In a series in which the character him/herself was a strong audience draw (and a solid basis for plots) a couple of itinerant guest-stars would not be able to completely usurp the plot (as did Hellcat and Man-Wolf in *SHE-HULK #13-4*). Human-interest stories spotlighting one-shot characters (such as *"Lady Kills the Blues"* in *SHE-HULK #15*) are not at all common in today's comics, nor are social consciousness tales (such as *"The Zapping of the She Hulk"* in *SHE-HULK #16*). Kraft and Vosburg could not simply construct adventures about the She-Hulk and her supporting cast—the

*According to my information, *SPIDER-WOMAN*'s peak for natural sales (after the inescapable first-through-third issue inflation) was the end of the Gruenwald/Infantino run. *MS. MARVEL* sold well when some particularly dynamic or popular artist was filling in, such as the Infantino or Cockrum issues.



Vosburg's experimental panel designs succeeded sometimes...and when they did, they succeeded very well..."

the series demanded stories and situations which would constitute sufficient reason to buy the comic *even though the She-Hulk was in it.*

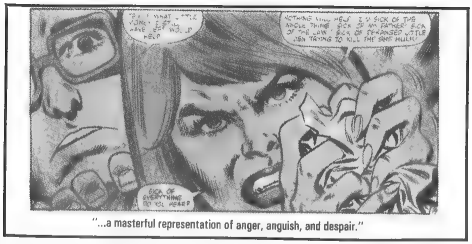
Even the most ardent She-Hulk scoffers (and I know more of them than She-Hulk fans) must admit that the creative team had their work cut out for them.

So, assuming that that was their goal, how did Kraft, Vosburg, and their editors fare? Well, not *too* badly, in that *SHE-HULK* was never a *complete* waste of time (no small achievement), but there were severe problems with the series' presentation, also, which undoubtably contributed to its cancellation. The primary problem was that many issues seemed interchangeable. Most issues had the exact same structure: Jennifer (She-Hulk) Walters whines about her problems (with gangster Lew Monkton, her authoritarian father, her two boyfriends, her gamma-ray curse, etc.), the different problems walk on and introduce themselves, a marginally-successful *"She-Hulk"* adventure ensues, and Jen whines some more. It's not a tremendously attractive pattern to begin with, and when used over and over again, it becomes especially tedious. The gang-war plot-line only gains any steam in the last two issues, although it began in issue #1; Jen's repeated refusal to deal directly with her double-identity and the problems it engenders is not suspenseful, it's just maddening.

And speaking of maddening, there's the presentation of Jennifer Walters herself. It's true that Kraft and Vosburg evolved her past the dumb bunny of issue #1 (who proclaimed publicly that she and she alone had evidence to convict a notorious mobster, as if her elimination were not the obvious consequence of such a ploy), but still the character never evolved past a well-intentioned, rather winsomely ineffectual lawyer who didn't ever know what she wanted to do in a situation, and could never cope on her own. Perhaps creating situations with which the protagonist's alter ego could not deal was/is considered necessary to induce her once-an-issue-at-least change to the She-Hulk, but a side effect of that pattern is to reduce Jen Walters to a *vertaholic*: when life gets too tough, instead of binge eating, drinking, etc., she turns green and beats something or somebody up (usually someone not having anything to do with Jen's problem, too). The *vertaholic* Jen Walters is no *better* than an alcoholic, either, as Zapper Ridge (boyfriend #1) points out in issue #20, page 8 (of an unpaginated story), "the She-Hulk," he states, "[is] an escape, like an alcoholic and his booze." Richard Rory (boyfriend #2 agrees: "You're staying the She-Hulk *not* because you can deal any better with the world that way, but because you're trying to escape Jen's problems—*your* problems!"

For better or worse, perhaps Jennifer Walters was intended to be one of those women who never *could* take a stand to defend herself or her beliefs. This is certainly indicated by the scene in which her father reviles her for defending "a known mass murderer," Morbius. Instead of denouncing Sheriff Walters' criminally prejudiced notion that individuals whom lawyers (or the public) consider guilty should not receive a capable defense (Walters is advocating trial by choice of lawyer), Jen meekly accepts his abuse, thinking that he's discovered that she's the She-Hulk. One might wonder why, if Jen was designed to be such an incapable shrinking violet as to *need* a She-Hulk persona to achieve any personal strength, the decision was made to make her a lawyer in the first place. (Probably so she could demonstrate that she was a more capable career woman than she was a friend, lover, daughter, etc., as she did by her fine work on the Dahlia trial (*"Lady Kills the Blues"*) and her refusal to take Lew Monkton's money under false pretenses. It's only unfortunate that Jennifer left most of her admirable qualities at the office.)

The series' art was a mixed blessing, also. While I've always enjoyed Mike Vosburg's people (especially women) and his expressiveness, I don't think that he was quite right for such a power-packed assignment, wherein the heroine needed to smash buses and uproot trees as well as smile and sashay. I don't think that any artist this side of Jack Kirby could have brought off this particular combination of brute strength and


NOTHING THAT HE'S SICK OF THE WHOLE THING AND HIS FATHER'S GOT THE LAW BACK OF HIM AND IS TRYING TO KILL THE BAD HULK!!
OOH, EVERYTHING'S GOT YOU WORRIED, HUH?

"...a masterful representation of anger, anguish, and despair."

feminine beauty (see Big Barda in *MISTER MIRACLE*), but Vosburg must still shoulder some of the blame for the unconvincing action scenes in *THE SHE-HULK*. Another problem is Vosburg's scattershot panel designs (and scripter Kraft's misplacement of his balloons inside them). The page on which the Man-Elephant describes his suit's powers is not only overcrowded with rather cluttered-looking small panels, but what's *in* the small panels is *blocked* by the explanatory balloons. Bad show, boys. Vosburg's experimental panel designs succeeded sometimes (see example), and when they did, they succeeded very well—but usually on the strength of the characters' expressions, not as designs *per se*.

On the other hand, Vosburg is as capable as any artist in the business (and more so than 4/5 of them) of clearly delineating his characters' thoughts and attitudes through their attitudes and facial expressions, and *THE SHE-HULK* needed that. Jennifer's obvious earnestness and concern for her associates and loved ones almost makes one forget what a failure she is at dealing with them, and her relationship with Rory is pictured as a very tender supportive one, wherein each *reacts* to the other's presence with insight and pleasure. Also, the drawing of Jennifer pushed over the brink after having been evicted from her home by her father (*SHE-HULK #19*, page 19) is a masterful representation of anger, anguish, and despair. Vosburg should be applauded for such expertise. It's almost a shame that such fine interpersonal goings-on should routinely be spoiled by ineffectual action scenes and silly gangsters. (*"Secret Life of the She-Hulk"* comics, anyone?)

However, that sort of tasteful, high-class-love-comic melodrama has not supported a comic book for many years now, and certainly that trend was not to be broken by a comic about a super-character whose title sounds like a rude schoolyard nickname. By the time this review is published, the verdant valkyrie's series will be only a memory—and one not widely mourned, I suspect. ●

1981 has been a good year for *AVENGERS* fans—at least for those fans who:

(1) wanted to see David Michelinie leave the book.

(2) preferred to see Gene Colan and George Perez working at DC rather than chronicling the exploits of Earth's Mightiest Super-Heroes.

(3) felt that Bob Hall, Alan Kupperberg, and Alan Weiss were adequate replacements for the above.

(4) were of the opinion that it was time for some wholesale

housecleaning—purging from the ranks of the Assemblers such lightweights as the Vision, the Scarlet Witch, Wonder Man, and the Beast, and replacing them with a character claiming to be Tigra the Werewoman.

(5) thought it high time that Hapless Hank Pym showed his true colors as borderline psychotic and full-time loser.

On the other hand, it hasn't been much of a year for those who didn't want to see the team turned into a collection of characters who bore little resemblance to the *mighty* Avengers during their days of glory. The post-#200 issues of *THE AVENGERS* have been about as much fun to such fans as having the Red Skull perform root canal work sans anasthesia.

Strong words, true, but based upon strong exception being taken to the "new direction" being mapped out for the book by current writer Jim Shooter. Granted the man's not *intentionally* torpedo-ing one of Marvel's longest-running, most popular titles, one can only assume that he think he's accomplishing something new, different, and good. Well, it *is* new. And it's certainly different.

It all started going wrong with the double-sized "special anniversary issue" #200, which—being both beyond the time frame of this review and already thoroughly analyzed, criticized, and demolished by (among others) Carol Strickland in *LOC #1*—need not be dwelled upon overlong at this time. Still, one might speculate that this offending and offensive "epic" built up so much bad karma that, despite Chris Claremont's efforts (in *AVENGERS ANNUAL #10*) to mitigate the damage somewhat, the book is still working it off. Even in compensation for that abomination, though, we the readers are quickly reaching the point of being subjected to cruel and unusual punishment.

To be fair, though, it must be said that *AVENGERS #201-215* have not been totally devoid of redeeming features. Issues #201 and #202 did offer the twin virtues of featuring the first solo story of that battling butler, the Impeccable Jarvis, and adapting Jim Shooter's prose "*Avengers*" story done for the Marvel novel series of a couple of years past. The former was long overdue, and, while basically unmemorable, did do justice to the book's longest-lived regular (longest-lived in terms of uninterrupted service, at least). As a matter of fact, Jarvis has come closest to maintaining some semblance of dignity and continuity of character during Shooter's second stewardship on the book.

The adaptation of the prose story was only semi-satisfactory, merely *good* when, given the quality of the source material, the final appearance of George Perez as penciller of the book, and the presence of ace Avenger villain Ultron, it could have been great. A little less than two full issues were just not enough to do full justice to Shooter's original story, and the relative brevity of the adaptation is especially puzzling since there was precious little immediately following it that anyone should have been in a hurry to get on to. (If nothing else, the above opinions should defend me from charges of being a knee-jerk Shooter-hater who would rake the guy over the coals even if he produced the comic-book equivalent of *WAR AND PEACE*.)

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Unfortunately, *THE AVENGERS* went nearly entirely downhill almost immediately after issues #201 and #202. Perez and Michelinie were gone, resulting in a series of rather lackluster fill-ins while the book awaited the assumption of control by the projected new team of Bill Mantlo and Gene Colan.

Issue #203 offered an off-beat tale starring Wonder Man and the Beast, and was primarily of interest due to the presence of master stylist Carmine Infantino as penciller. Just as Perez had concluded his Marvel career with the previous issues, so too did Carmine make his last (non-*STAR WARS*) contribution to the House of Ideas with this epic. Mayhap part of the "Issue 200 Curse" is that superior artists who draw the book tend to head over to the Distinguished Competitor soon thereafter. The fact that Hall, Kupperberg, and Weiss have (as yet) not signed DC contracts while Perez, Colan and Infantino have would certainly not tend to discredit such a hypothesis.

Issues #204-205 offered the high point of the "mark-time" run of issues, as they featured a confrontation with the ever-sinister Yellow Claw, courtesy of the combined talents of Shooter, Editor Jim Salicrup, Bob Budiansky, Don Newton, Kupperberg, and Dan Green. The Claw was a foe definitely capable of testing the team's collective mettle, and did so in fine fashion. The first installment was especially nice as it featured some of Don Newton's most effective artwork.

The Mantlo/Colan combo made a pretty inauspicious debut in issue #206, however. The story—featuring villainous newcomer Thermal Man and guest-starring the Human Torch—was serviceable at best, but the artwork was a real disappointment. The Colan/Green art just didn't gel—Colan's layouts and the facial expressions he gave the various characters bespoke of a long period away from straight super-hero jobs, while Green's inking failed to tighten up the pencils sufficiently, and certainly suffered in comparison to the many previous contributions made by Tom Palmer as Colan-inker supreme.

Gene the Dean's artwork was certainly not above reproach in this or subsequent issues, though one might legitimately argue that he at least did justice to the plots he was given to work with. (Be that as it may, one cannot but wonder whether it was not possible to couch constructive criticism in such a way that Mr. Colan did not feel it in his best interests to seek employment elsewhere.)

Speaking of plots done full justice to by mediocre artwork, we come to Budiansky and Fingeroth's (who *are* these guys anyway??) effort in issues #207-208. The "last-survivor-of-a-lost-race" is one of the hoariest cliches in comicdom, and issue #207's Shadow Lord failed to offer a sufficiently intersting variation on the

theme to justify his creation. The issue did have a couple of good interactive bits of business between the Beast and Wonder Man, but it also gave the Assemblers the opportunity to stick their collective foot in it nearly as badly as they did in issue #200. Not only did they unwittingly cause the death of the heroic Shadow Lord, but they left his foeman, the Berserker, footloose and fancyfree so as to drag out the storyline for yet another forgettable issue.

Issue #209, courtesy of J.M. DeMatteis and Alan Kupperberg, had a little more substance to it, spotlighting as it did the four soon-to-be ex-Avengers, Vision, Scarlet Witch, Wonder Man, and (especially) the Beast. The story, structurally similar to DeMatteis' first effort on the Defenders in issue #92 of their book (as well as any number of old *"JLA"* stories), did at least offer the return of the ever-delightful Vera from the pages of the original *X-MEN*, though the probability of further reappearances by Hank McCoy's old girl-friend appeared bleak at story's end.

I had hoped that *"The Wrath of the Weathermen"* in issue #210 would pit our heroes against hordes of irate meteorologists out to get Thor (who was returning to active Avengering with this issue after sitting out the action since issue #202) for ruining so many of their forecasts. No such luck, though. Instead, the Avengers ran afoul of a HAL-like rogue computer by the unwieldy name of Samar-oleryn and his (its) human pawns. In keeping with the nature of the villain, the story was played out rather mechanically and predictably—at least until the last panel wherein Captain America announced that it was time once again to proclaim that "the Old Order Changeth."

Actually though, Cap was merely acting as spokesman for the guy really doing the changing, Jim Shooter. Yep, the Big Boss had decided that he rather than Bill Mantlo should take the reins of the book so he could follow through on his avowed intention of turning the book back into what he said it should have essentially always been—a team dominated by the heavy artillery of the Marvel Universe; "Your Favorite Heroes Together." Or something like that.

As these words are being written, we are but five issues into the Shooter Regime, and it is simply too early to fully judge the impact of what Shooter has done—and will do—on and to the book. No major plot threads have as yet been carried through to fruition, nor have rational explanations been offered for some of the more irrational actions of a number of characters. What Shooter has in mind as the ultimate pay-off for all the things he has set in motion can only be speculated upon at the present time. What *he* thinks he's accomplishing I can't really say; what *I* think he's accomplishing (though I would gladly be proven wrong in this) is the needless ruination of one of comicdom's premier books.

If nothing else, Shooter hit the ground running with issue #211, taking but one issue to rid the book of a quartet of full-time Avengers, plus one semi-Avenger (Jocasta); add one new Avenger (Tigra) and one old Avenger (Yellowjacket) to (supposedly) replace them; guest-star a number of inactive Avengers (Hawkeye, Black Panther, Black Window, Hercules, and the ever-insufferable Moondragon [who showed once again why she is the hands-down winner of the Howard Cossell Humility and Congeniality Award]) and non-Avengers (Dazzler, Moon Knight, Iceman, and the Angel), *and* divest Marvel of one of its artistic mainstays, Gene Colan.

This is not the place for a eulogy to Gentleman Gene's Marvel career, so let us concentrate on the internal action of the issue.

It was inexplicable, to say the least. Either Moondragon for as-yet-unexplained reasons of her own manipulated the participants a lot more than they yet realize, or Cap really did start acting like a little tin god: "As current chairman, I'm invoking my right to limit our number. [*What* right??] Only six of us can stay! [Why not five? Or seven?] The rest go! [And good riddance, ya wimps]", and the rest of the group really did go along with his ill-motivated fiat. How else can one explain the reasoning behind the departure of the Vision and the others?

Actually, a rather strong rationale can be extrapolated from the events depicted in *AVENGERS ANNUAL #10*, had that issue merely appeared before this one. But more on that later.) How else can one explain Tigra's decision to ask to join the group, and the willingness of the remaining Assembler to let this *extremely* unknown quantity into the team?

I fervently hope that Shooter intends to explain what really happened in *AVENGERS #211* in the not-too distant future. If not, then this issue will be able to take its rightful place next to the "membership madness" issues of *THE DEFENDERS (#62-64)* as prime examples of almost total jettisoning of believable characterization for the sake a single story.

In the meantime, Shooter had indeed managed to reshape the line-up to conform with his vision (no pun intended) of "what it should be"—one dominated by established solo stars. From published reports, it appears that—at least to Shooter's mind—this concept had been lost as "lesser" characters joined the ranks and shunted the more established stars aside. He apparently must then feel that the book has been living on borrowed time since issue #16, since the first fifteen were the *only* issues to feature a line-up primarily composed of characters who were simultaneously holding down their own solo careers. Clearly this initial "purpose" of the book had been modified if not totally abandoned over the yeras, the reasons doubtless being that greater character development and meaningful progress in the lives of the team were only possible when the spotlight was shifted to characters who were not constrained by what was going on in their own strips (which were generally written by other writers).

Certainly the Avengers have thrived on change, and I for one have had no aversion to rather frequent and significant alterations in the active roster, but neither a careful analysis of the history of the book nor any apparent weakness in current sales would seem to offer sufficient justifications for the changes Shooter initiated. If he wanted to get the Avengers "back to where they belonged," it was and

The "ever-insufferable Moondragon" in somewhat more restrained times.

is strictly one man's opinion which supported the changes made. Of course when that man is Editor-in-Chief, that is more than enough to back the moves. Whether or not that is enough to ensure that the changes *work* is another question.

Be that as it may, it seems that if it's Shooter's opinion that Hank Pym is basically a weak, unstable personality ("a haunted, hollow man" as that noted master of psychoanalysis Tony Stark soliloquized in issue #213's "*Court Martial*") whose one lasting accomplishment of any real scientific note was the creation of Ultron, well then, by God that's the way Hank is going to be handled! And if that's the way Dr. Pym is going to act, then he's certainly no longer worthy of the love and compassion of the Wasp, who tells him in no uncertain terms to buzz off (in issue #214): "For years I've *lived* for you, clinging to you and worshipping you to support your fragile-ego! I submerged myself completely to prop you up! No more! Never again! Now, please leave!"

Now some may see this as a compelling, realistic depiction of the break-up of a marriage. I see it as the radical alteration of two major Marvel characters, and the utter ruination of one of them. Hank Pym is *not* a "haunted, hollow man" supported only by the sympathy of family and friends, and unable to carry his own weight as either a hero or a scientist. Sure, he came a cropper with Ultron, but he is also directly or indirectly responsible for the existence of such do-gooders as Ant-Man, Giant-Man, the Vision, Jocasta, and, oh yes, the wonderful Wasp. That's right, Jim; remember how Hank took a slightly flighty eighteen-year-old heiress and created a super-heroine? All alone, with no help and with no complications? Nor does this cover all that Dr. Pym has accomplished; he's contributed more to the Marvel mythos than all but a handful of other characters.* True, his popularity has at best run hot and cold, but what's he done to merit this treatment?

Only Shooter knows. Is Yellowjacket being called upon to become Shooter's "answer" to Dark Phoenix? Is this to be Jim's object lesson in how to turn a long time Marvel good guy into a no-looking-back baddie without falling into the overkill trap that shot down Claremont and Byrne's cosmic character? It certainly appears that way.

The problem is that it just doesn't work unless on (a) misreads, (b) ignores, or (c) just doesn't care about Henry Pym's career and life history, *and* one manipulates the other Avengers so that they (a) courtmartial Hank after one (albeit rather major) screw-up (with good old Cap once again throwing his weight around as prosecutor), and (b) are allowed to think the occasional compassionate thought about their troubled colleague, but shut off the milk of human kindness at just the right times to avoid actually helping him.

"...if it's Shooter's opinion that Hank Pym is basically a weak, unstable personality... well, then, by God that's the way Hank is going to be handled!"

To accomplish the latter, the Avengers have had to ultimately "realize" (issue #214) that it is, after all, up to Hank to straighten out his own life; they'll be happy to lend support once he's gotten himself back under control anyway. This might be a fine approach were Hank fighting his conscience over some moral or ethical quandary of his own creation. But given Hank's admitted emotional and mental instability (which, despite Shooter's revisionist interpretation of Hank's career and personality, is certainly the result of *physical* strain brought about by Dr. Pym's efforts to make himself a more efficient crimefighter), the *laissez faire* attitude doesn't make much sense.

It ends up sounding like the Avengers, and through them Shooter, are advocating a Reaganomic approach to mental health—let the "market forces" of Hank's free will operate unobstructed, and by all means don't let "big brother" impose a solution from the outside. Instead of "finding Hank and helping him whether he realizes he needs it or not is our first mission as Avengers and as his friends," it's "well, he knows where we are. Let him find us if he wants to."

While I enjoy the Wasp greatly as a character, and admire the way Marvel writers—including Shooter himself—have improved both her powers and her personality over the past few years, I can't say I'm overwhelmed with admiration as to how *she's* handled the situation thus far. If we were to be brutally frank about it, her marriage is *founded* on Hank's fragile personality. Said problem first manifested itself in *AVENGERS #59-60*, wherein Hank went temporarily off the deep end, created his Yellowjacket *persona*, and married Janet Van Dyne while still unaware that he was, in fact, Henry (Goliath) Pym. The Wasp, on the other hand, was aware of the situation, and, using some questionable logic, rationalized the acceptability of getting Hank to the altar while the opportunity presented itself. After all, if he were in his right mind, how would she ever be able to convince Hank (still grieving over the death of his first wife, viz. *TALES TO ASTONISH #60*) to tie the knot? Should she then really be all that surprised and traumatized when the problem manifests itself again, but *this* time in a way that hurts her rather than helps her? Shouldn't she and the other Avengers instead have been better prepared to deal with the situation; indeed, shouldn't they have taken steps to assure that the situation would never arise? If Shooter insists on

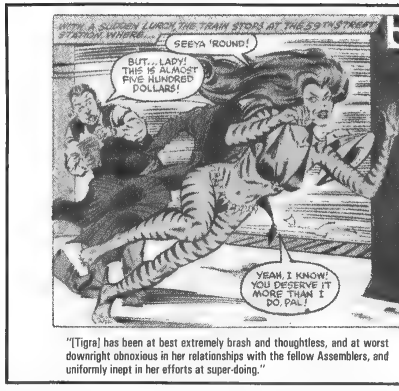
*According to the Marvel Mythos, Henry Pym was solely responsible for (and is still the main authority on) the process through which living tissue can be shrunken and enlarged while still retaining full functional capacity. He is also responsible for a process by which to communicate with and command insects, a process to harness the human body's "bio-electric energy" into adrenalin-like "stinger" bursts, and a process through which functional insect-like characteristics can be simulated in human beings. He is—or was until *AVENGERS #213*—unquestionably the "finest living bio-chemist on [Marvel-] Earth."

playing the game of turning heroes into villains, shouldn't he be sure that he's able to tell which is which? Is Hank villain or victim? Has Janet really propped Hank up for years, or has she exploited and taken advantage of him to satisfy her own wants and desires like the spoiled heiress she supposedly did *not* develop into? (I know this sounds like an indictment of Janet Pym, despite my disclaimer at the top of this paragraph. It isn't really. I'm just trying to point out the real can of worms that Shooter has opened up. Maybe he plans to explore this angle in the future. If not, then my argument is that he has *not* adequately handled the situation, because he's not dealt sufficiently with *all* the problems *he's* created.)

Whew, heavy stuff, eh? But on the lighter side, if I don't care for the way Shooter has handled the old Avengers, what about what he's done with the newest addition to the team, Tigra? She at least has such a brief and insignificant personal history that any consistent handling of the character is likely to be an improvement, and stands very little chance of violating her previous profile. Well, all I can say is that if the first five issues are any indication, then Jarvis is demonstrating his usual impeccable good taste in being allergic to her. She's been at best extremely brash and thoughtless, and at worst downright obnoxious in her relationships with the fellow Assemblers, and uniformly inept in her efforts at super-doing. Still, five issues isn't very long, especially since the resolution of the Molecule Master story-line (unseen in these parts) seems likely to be the big make-or-break payoff for Tigra as an Avenger.

In talking about Shooter's issues to date, I've not spent much time discussing the actual plots or the artwork. That's because the latter has been no better than serviceable, while the former has merely been a necessary vehicle through which Shooter could conduct his character analysis, manipulations, and assassinations. Can anyone as yet really figure out what happened in issue #211? Does anyone really care about issue #212's Elfqueen or her late unlamented barbarian boyfriend Gorn? Was there a plot to issue #213 except for Shooter's plot to get Hank out of the team?

Issue #214 existed, as alluded to above, to allow Shooter to philosophize on the true nature of super-heroes and to expound upon his "self-help" idea for wayward heroes. But Shooter should receive credit for his solid indepth analysis of the character of Ghost Rider, and for stating clearly that in G.R. we have *no* hero under *any* acceptable definition of the term. Even so, the long arm of


WITH A SUDDEN LURCH, THE TRAIN STOPS AT THE 59TH STREET STATION. WHERE...
SEEYA 'ROUND!
BUT... LADY! THIS IS ALMOST FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS!
YEAH, I KNOW! YOU DESERVE IT MORE THAN I DO, PAL!
5

"[Tigra] has been at best extremely brash and thoughtless, and at worst downright obnoxious in her relationships with the fellow Assemblers, and uniformly inept in her efforts at super-doing."

improbability which allowed G.R. to zero in on a car which just happened to contain within it Warren Worthington III as a symbol of all that he hates in society seems to me to reflect the fact that Shooter is not spending a lot of time at present worrying about plot mechanisms. Actions and events seem to exist merely to allow the author further opportunities to explore and develop characterization.

Is this necessarily bad? Of course not, so long as (1) said characterization is believable and reasonable given what has gone before, and (2) a balance is struck somewhere along the line which allows the Avengers to get on with the business of villain-smashing and world-saving for their own sakes rather than just as a backdrop to the existential *Angst* which permeates the book.

Judging by issue #215, the balance has not yet been satisfactorily struck. Molecule Man, sharing the characterization spotlight with Tigra, is quickly reduced to the status of buffoon courtesy of Alan Weiss' visual interpretation and Shooter's explanation of "what he's all about." Granted, the character was no great shakes to begin with, but the least he deserves is that Shooter get all his facts right before dealing with the poor guy's innermost thoughts. For instance, accuracy of characterization might have been better served had Shooter shown any indication that he *knew* he was dealing with the *son* of the original Molecule Man (viz. *MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #1*). Thus it wasn't *his* origin that we saw in *FANTASTIC FOUR #20*, nor do his ramblings about his middle-aged parents who hated him sound particularly likely under the circumstances.

Earlier mention was made of *AVENGERS ANNUAL #10*, and no review of events since *AVENGERS #200* would be complete without a discussion of it. Being published around the same time as *AVENGERS #213*, it served as a swan song of sorts for the pre-Shooter Avengers line-up as it featured Thor, Cap, Iron Man, Vision, Beast, Wonder Man, Scarlet Witch, Hawkeye, *and* the return of the erstwhile Ms. Marvel, Carol Danvers. Had it been published before issue #211, this Claremont/Michael Golden collaboration might have served as a convincing spring-board for the big membership shake-up, for the annual existed essentially for the purpose of mitigating some of the damage done in issue #200, as the now-powerless Ms. Marvel returned to the Avengers just long enough to tell them what she really thought of them, and how they failed her. A supposed triumph was revealed to be an utter screw-up.

Such an eye-opener about the Avengers' shortcomings and complacency might just have served as a convincing rationale for several members to start questioning their status. One can imagine the older, more experienced—more jaded if you will—members maintaining the need for the continuation of the team despite this defeat—a defeat for the Avengers as

people rather than for the Avengers as super-heroes. On the other hand, other members less sure of their individual lives beyond their status as Avengers might start worrying about the insularity of life inside Avengers Mansion, and wondering whether they might not need to expand their personal horizons.

Unfortunately, this must remain but idle speculation. *AVENGERS ANNUAL #10* came out two months too late to perform this function. It was left instead to Moondragon and editorial fiat to accomplish what *might* have developed logically and organically out of the events depicted in issue #200.

Above and beyond the might-have-beens, the annual did serve to introduce yet another of Claremont's growing list of extremely powerful female characters in the person of the evil mutant Rogue, and to write *fini* to the super-heroic career of Ms. Marvel. One hopes that Rogue (solo or in tandem with her fellow members of the New Brotherhood of Evil Mutants) does not prove to be too powerful to be utilized effectively. And one hopes that Carol Danvers, whose potential as a costumed character no one was ever quite able to fully tap, finds a new lease on life as a supporting character in *THE X-MEN*.

Yes, Ms. Marvel and a lot of other very good characters have departed the pages of the book over the past year-plus. So, too, have some very talented pencillers and one superior writer (Michelinie). But good characters still remain, and so too, though this may sound rather surprising after all I've said, does a very good writer. There's no question about Jim Shooter's talent as a writer—I just think he's made some *very bad* choices about the purpose and the direction of *THE AVENGERS*.

Hank Pym's situation is certainly fraught with dramatic potential, but I feel that potential can be best exploited by having Hank ultimately cured rather than have him form a permanent alliance with Egghead. The departed Avengers *are* gone; nothing is forever in this book, but Wanda and her hubby and the others should probably not be back for quite a while.

That leaves the super-heroes primarily resting on the sturdy shoulders of Cap, Goldilocks, and Shellhead. But there is relatively little meaningful character development which can be done with them in the pages of this book. Tigra doesn't seem to be up to carrying the personality load all by herself, so we will probably see guest stars like Ghost Rider, the Angel, and the Silver Surfer continue to pop up. Dazzler, Moon Knight, and Iceman all appeared briefly in issue #211, so they might be seen again in the immediate future, though none of them strike me as real Avengers material. I'd kinda like to see the new Ant-Man make the Avenging scene; talk about your potential for character interaction and conflict.

But then I don't write them; I just read 'em. I'd like to say that I'm perfectly happy to sit back and let Jim Shooter continue to deliver the goods, but instead I find myself wishing that we could just go back to around *AVENGERS #199* again and try and get it right this time. ●

YEAR IN REVIEW 1981

by Chuck Huber

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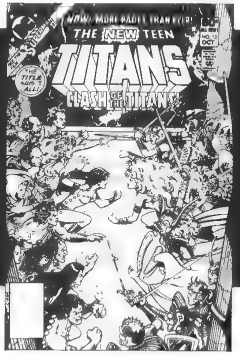

In the course of little over a year, Marv Wolfman and George Perez (with the assistance of Len Wein, Romeo Tanghal and a cast of thousands) have done what seemed impossible: they have created a DC title which is at once a certified fan favorite and a runaway best-seller. Actually, of course, the phenomenon is only unusual in the very short view. In earlier years, the Justice League and the Legion of Super-Heroes, to name only two, spawned major fan movements. But it is fair to say that *The New Teen Titans* is the first DC title to make such a breakthrough since the rise of the "Direct Sales Age of Comics."

To identify the elements which have made the title so successful, it may be useful to go over each issue in turn, and give the brief reactions I felt on first reading them before extracting the overall trends and themes from the series:

Issue #1: Opening sequence with Princess Leia, er, I mean Koriand'r is a good set-up for the character, drops a few hints of background detail. Character is visually dynamic, though a bit too reminiscent of the Byrne Phoenix. Raven is also very visually interesting and presumably her powers and motives will be explained in future issues. Handling of the old Titans, Robin, Kid Flash and Wonder Girl is good. The origin recap of Wonder Girl was probably useful for new readers, though it might have been more necessary for Changeling who popped up out of nowhere. Cyborg... hmmm... another bitter black super-hero; how tiresome. The concept of the Gordanians as a pervasive group of nasty aliens for the DC Universe is useful, but why in the world all the evil aliens have to be green and reptilian, while good-guy aliens like Koriand'r are humanoid, I can't fathom. Hints of a *Purpose* for the new team from Raven are interesting—providing motivation for super-heroes is not always easy, though. Wolfman's dialogue reads well, and I've always liked Perez's art so overall impressions are good.

Issue #2: *"Today, the Terminator."* Enter the HIVE, another Wolfman addition to the DC Universe. The acronym sounds properly sinister, but "Hierarchy of International Vengeance and Eliminations??" Why, oh why, must every criminal organization have a stupid title as an excuse for a snappy acronym?? Starfire's method of learning English (absorbing knowledge through bodily contact—in this case passionately kissing Robin) is highly amusing... wish Berlitz had such entertaining techniques. The Terminator is a fairly interesting villain, but I really doubt his ability to take on the Titans. Reflexes fast enough to catch Kid Flash? Come on, Marv! The business about Grant (Ravager) Wilson being the Terminator's son rings a little hollow. He supposedly has a shady father (and brother, who is never again referred to) according to page 3; one page 19, he doesn't recognize his father (masked), his father's servant, or the building his father dwells in. Granted, a story could be devised to explain how Grant totally lost any contact with his father (apparently believing him dead) but it all seems rather jumbled here.

More mystery from Raven... her confrontations with the being in the pentagram and with Kid Flash are both tantalizing. Marv and George show a good light touch in the poolside scenes. Visual handling of both Changeling and Kid Flash very good. Perez certainly draws nice (comic-book style) women.

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AND BECAUSE OF YOU, SELF-RIGHTEOUS SUPER HEROES, THOSE SORCERERS WERE "UNHARTED. TRIGON IS ARISE
AND WHY DO YOU THINK ALL THIS?
RAVEN TOLD US... SHE'S THE ONE WHO BROUGHT US TOGETHER
HERE? WEEKS AGO, THE APPEARED BEFORE THE LEAGUE TELLING THE SAME STORY

More insight into Cyborg and his father is useful... clearly Marv is leading up to some big story here. Nice Touch Dep't: "We can simply get Superman or Green Lantern to take you home." Stupid Science Dept: Doesn't Marv know that the decibel scale is a logarithmic scale? A "million or so decibels of white sound" would require more Boeing 747's taking off than there are atoms in the planet Earth... needless sloppiness.

Issue #3: *"The Fearsome Five."* I like Dr. Light; he's one of the better DC villains not attached to any particular hero's Rogues Gallery. His appearance provided the only brief flash of interest in the previous revival of the Teen Titans. Here, with his allies, he seems like a bumbling Magneto complete with Brotherhood of Evil Mutants. Still, most of the new villains seem ok, though I find Gizmo offensive. Psimon's plan seems a little confused; if he wanted to capture the Titans, why did he induce Dr. Light to let them go the first time they were defeated?

The origin of Starfire was interesting and looks like the basis of plotlines to come. The building mystery of Raven and Trigon, as well as the set-up for a confrontation with the JLA are proceeding nicely.

Issue #4: *"Against All Friends!"* What a mish-mosh! This is supposed to be the sequence of events: (1) Zatanna detects magical emanations which are putting holes in the ozone layer (oh brother!). (2) Raven goes to the JLA to seek aid against Trigon. Zatanna detects evil within Raven, so the JLA dismisses her story. Huh? If Raven was "evil," wouldn't the Leaguers have detained her to try to discover what she was attempting to trick them into? Wouldn't Zatanna have used her magic to attempt to force the "truth" from Raven? Similarly, Green Lantern could have used his ring, or Wonder Woman her lasso. But instead, they apparently let her go without even attempting to pry the location of the awful ozone-destroying magic source from her... (3) Some time after this, Raven starts forming the New Teen Titans to do battle with Trigon, conqueror of dimensions. With all due respect to the Titans, they seem inadequate to the task. If Raven was realistic enough to go to the JLA first, she presumably could have sought out some other heroes as well. Supergirl and the Phantom Stranger leap to mind, and there are others, even if you assume that she couldn't contact such "un-Earthly" aid as the Guardians or the New Gods. Yes, I realize that this would have defeated the purpose of an origin for the new Titans, but she asserts (p. 24) that Kid Flash was selected specifically for his power. If she couldn't think of anyone more suited to battle mystic menaces than the Changeling, she mustn't have been thinking very hard. (4) At the issue's beginning, we see the JLA going off to find the ozone destroyers, who turn out to be a group of sorcerors, and who proceed to attack the JLA on sight. Raven shows up, is attacked by GL, and decides to leave. The sorcerors knock the JLA off their pins, talk to Raven and she (and they?) vanish. Has anyone ever heard of trying reason before attacking in this book? (5) Meanwhile, we learn that Psimon's plan is to use the Titans to destroy the JLA. According to the previous issue this is part of Trigon's master plan. But later in the issue, Trigon is using the JLA to defeat the sorcerors, and doesn't want the Titans to interfere. Huh? (6) The final battle scene is the most confusing of all. The Titans get teleported to the now-familiar twisted peaks where the confrontation with Trigon is going on. Then the JLA arrives, transported by Trigon. They know that they have been brought by forces beyond their control. Yet they immediately attack the Titans and the sorcerors without questioning. Now it might be theorized that Trigon was

controlling their minds... but if he could do that to the Justice Leaguers himself why did he bother to create Psimon? Anyway, a brief battle rages, and then Trigon breaks through, and sends both JLA and Titans flying. Clearly, this is a palpable demonstration of Trigon's power. On page 23, Changeling says "...I could actually feel his evil." However, mere moments later, after Zatanna's revelation of Raven's manipulations, all the Leaguers and Titans immediately decide that Raven has been lying about everything, and walk off without the least thought of investigating the obviously real menace of Trigon. There is no question that the final page scene of Raven helplessly pleading as her fellow heroes walk away is very emotionally effective. It would have been still better if it could withstand analysis of the circumstances.

Issue #5: "Trigon Lives!" It was a very pleasant surprise to find Curt Swan outside the "Superman Family" magazines. The different surroundings lent a freshness to the well-known virtues of his art. I liked the scenes with Cyborg and Kid Flash on p. 6, and Cyborg and Changeling on p. 14. Victor Stone is growing as a character, and it's becoming evident that Wolfman planned a gradual development. One flaw: the argument (p. 24) that Trigon has been repeatedly sparing the Titans lives for the sake of making them his super-powered slaves rings hollow. What does he need the Titans for?

Issue #6: "Last Kill!" With this story, we finally get some real evidence of just how evil Trigon is, though he seems curiously short-sighted and soft-hearted when it comes to his mate and his daughter. I was surprised at how consistently true to themselves the denizens of Temple Azarath remained through this series. Normally comic book pacifists come to some crisis where they reluctantly take up violence. The reactions of the various Titans to this philosophy were also useful for insights into their personalities. While the hubbub of clashes and fleeing and clashing again on Trigon's world seemed a little ill-planned, the final battle was a pretty good piece of teamwork, and a reasonably convincing way of disposing of a foe far more powerful than the Titans.

Issue #7: "Assault on Titan's Tower!" The character development in this issue continued nicely. For some reason, I didn't find the total changeover in attitude of Cyborg toward his father quite convincing. If Cyborg knew the cause of the accident, why would the fact that his father was also critically injured by it suddenly turn hate into love? But, it was a very useful step for the character so I won't complain too much. The little bits of business involving Starfire and her open approach to the subtleties of American idioms are always fun (p. 2): "And you are a fine-looking mother yourself." One the other hand, the return of Dr. Light and his cronies was dull. Gizmo's personality and limitless bag of tricks are annoying. Dr. Light is becoming less and less of the master villain he's supposed to be. And as for Mammoth and Shimmer, why, pray tell, does someone with matter-transmuting powers turn to crime? Why doesn't she just start turning lead to gold, pig iron to platinum, and garbage to diamonds? Surely it's an easier road to fabulous wealth than getting punched out by super-heroes?

Issue #8: "A Day in the Lives..." Easily the best effort thus far! The scene with Wally West and his parents was very nicely handled. Mr. and Mrs. West are clearly cut of the same fine fabric as Ma and Pa Kent. Super-heroes with living, loving parents are scarce and precious commodities in modern comics, and it's a real pleasure to see such outside the pages of *SUPERBOY*. Raven's odyssey was also a welcome development: it rid her of an arbitrary "weakness" and marked Raven's acceptance of a more active role in battling evil, which will be necessary for her to remain a viable member of the team. But by far the best segments were those involving Victor Stone. In one grand moment, Cyborg became the most affirmative of the Titans, thanks to Sarah Simms and her young charges. The scene felt *right*. No higher compliment can be given.

Issue #9: "Like Puppets on a String!" This story had clear signs of being a set-up issue. It began the delving into the Changeling/Steve Dayton/Doom Patrol background and set up a confrontation with the Terminator again. The Puppeteer did manage to come across better as a villain then Dr. Light did in the earlier outings. Marv continues with the occasional scientific silliness—the concept of "Promethium" (though someone did note that there is a real element by that name) and the ever-present "million decibels of white sound." Sigh. Not much character development this issue.

Issue #10: "Promethium Unbound!" —I'm still not that impressed by the Terminator as an arch-villain, but his scheme for revenge against the HIVE wasn't bad. Are we to believe that two of the seven leaders of the HIVE are dead? Nah. Even more unlikely is the real death of the Changeling, since Marv just this issue finally got around to recapping his origin and career with the Doom Patrol. Highlight of the issue: return of Robotman in his original robot body! Otherwise, it's a so-so issue.

Issue #11: "When Titans Clash." Time

WHATEVER TRIGON BLASTED US WITH, I STILL FEEL IT RIGHT DOWN TO MY TOENAILS!
WOW! MY HEAD'S STILL RINGING FROM THE PAIN. EVEN MY HAIR HURTS.
HALF THE BLASTED CIRCUITS IN MY HEAD ARE SPUTTERIN' STATIC!

"The different surroundings [of the *TEEN TITANS*] lent a freshness to the well-known virtues of *[Curt Swan's] art."*

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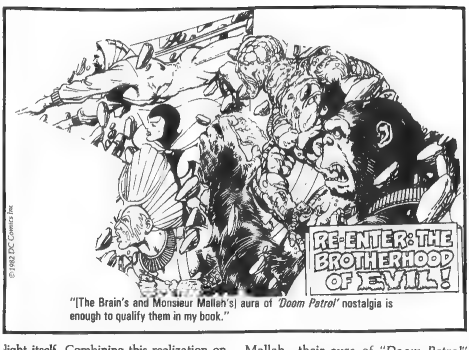
to highlight the female Titans, it appears, and to delve into Wonder Girl's background a bit. Since it gave us a chance to see George Perez's rendition of Paradise Island and the Amazons, it was well worth it. This version of the good Queen Hippolyta and her subjects has the kind of grandeur which ought to be on display in *WONDER WOMAN* all the time. It's ironic that Perez should choose to use the eagle as a pervasive Amazon motif just an Wonder Woman herself is discarding the emblem in her own book. Silly Sloppiness of the Month: A Greek Titan using the phrase (p. 12) "accepts...as gospel." Hardly appropriate unless you assume that Hyperion was using his idle centuries in Tartarus to bone up on Christian Scriptures. The topic of a super-heroine being seduced by powers beyond her control is a sensitive one in the comics since the Ms. Marvel debacle in *AVENGERS #200*. Still, it's too early to praise or damn Marv and George for their handling of the topic in this issue. And the male Titans have begun the search for the killers of the Doom Patrol! Yay!

Issue #12: "Clash of the Titans." So the mysterious figure at the end of the last issue was Athena? A pity, for I'd hoped it was Thia, Hyperion's spouse. We were told last issue that she had mysteriously vanished from Tartarus prior to Hyperion's escape. At the time, I assumed that this would have some bearing on the plot. No such luck. It turned out to just be a device to allow one of the Titans, all of whom had mates in Greek Myth, to fall in love (?) with Wonder Girl—no explanation, no possible rationale. This is very sloppy plotting. Another, lesser, bit of sloppiness: on p. 4, Crius, the male Titan of Memory, suggests that he and his mate could restore Wonder Girl's childhood memories. Granted that Donna had other things on her mind at story's end (and has been fairly busy since), but surely Crius and Mnemosyne should have remembered—by definition! And despite the overall care in handling of Greek myth, Poseidon is not the son of Oceanus and Tethys, but, like Zeus, of Chronos and Rhea. A minor point, true, but one indicative of a general lack of care in the story. Still, this epilogue to the history of the Greek gods is intersting, and the passing-of-the-generations theme a good one. I especially like Raven's admission on the last page that she was guilty of the same sins of manipulation with regard to Kid Flash as Hyperion was to Wonder Girl. Also Hippolyta's reminiscence of her encounter with Olympian romance was insightful, and the final reunion of Donna Troy and Terry Long was excellent.

Issue #13: "Friends and Foes Alike!" What a cover! The scene of Robotman dangling, battered and broken, on the vine-covered ruin, and the Titans' reactions to same, made for a very effective scene. The interior of the book was nice, too. The scenes with Donna and Terry in New York was useful in developing their relationship, and explaining Donna's reaction to the manipulation. The comparison of philosophies between Tamaran (Starfire), Azarath (Raven) and Paradise Island (Hippolyta) on page 9 was good, but I think the tournament scenes with Starfire were overlong, and the monstrous attack of the Changeling/dinosaur seemed simply pointless. Still, I have to applaud the humorous allusion to Steve Trevor's history-making encounter with an "angel" when Gar finally comes to on page 17. But the main story is the quest for Madame Rouge, and that only just gets underway in this issue. So far so good. Marv seems to have a good grasp of the personality of Cliff Steele as shown in the dialogue with Cyborg on p. 13 and in his reaction to the sight of Madame Rouge and Zahl on p. 22. I can't figure out where Rouge got the resources to build her underground city, even if she has had a few years to work on it. A highlight for me was the use of Kid Flash in this issue; not only his continuing debate over whether or not to be a super-hero, but the more effective use of the power of super-speed. Marv Wolfman seems to be one of the very few writers at DC who understand the implications of the speed of the Flash. Whether it be Wally, Barry, or Jay, with the Flash, to think is to act. If there is *any* warning, no single weapon can strike a man who can travel faster than



"[The Brain's and Monsieur Mallah's] aura of *'Doom Patrol'* nostalgia is enough to qualify them in my book."

light itself. Combining this realization on the part of the writer with an artist who can portray super-speedsters effectively results in sheer delight for a Flash-fan.

Issue #14: "Revolution!" Well, the basic premise of the hunt for the killers of the Doom Patrol is still a good one, but this issue betrayed a number of little flaws which lessened the effect. The question of how Madame Rouge got the resources to construct her flying island became even harder to answer in this issue. Why did the Titans set up camp (p. 12) so near Rouge's hideaway while Dayton was explaining things, knowing that her armored army might come pouring after them at any moment? Gar Logan's reaction (p. 16, 17) to the near-presence of the DP's killers was realistic enough, but why was Robotman so passive in this scene? Especially in light of his vows to smash Rouge and Zahl last issue, there is no reason for him to be any calmer than Changeling at this point. He was at least *as* close as Gar was to Larry, Rita and the Chief, not to mention his personal score against Rouge. I'm sure the reason for Cliff's calm (in the external sense) was to allow Changeling center stage, but there was no internal justification.

Issue #15: "The Brotherhood of Evil Lives Again!" As the title implies, this issue is as much devoted to the new Brotherhood of Evil as to the plot of Madame Rouge. Since the TT needed some continuing opponents of higher caliber than the Fearsome Five or the Terminator, that's just as well. Again, though, Marv has only done a so-so job of creating villains. I have no complaints about the Brain or Monsieur Mallah—their aura of "Doom Patrol" nostalgia is enough to qualify them in my book. The Warp has interesting powers; as demonstrated in this issue, they have offensive uses, and are handy for the villain's traditional last minute getaway. He also has potential to be developed as a semi-sympathetic character (avaricious but not hateful). Phobia, too, has interesting abilities and they combine well with her cold-heartedness. She obviously obtains her lipstick from the Jack Kirby Boutique for Super-Females. The other two, however, are losers. The ability to combine science and sorcery, to me, implies a considerable mastery of both. A garish costume and computerized voodoo dolls do not convey such expertise. Sorry, Houngan. Plasmus suffers from the defect of an all-or-nothing power. He either does nothing to his heroic opponent, or he slays the foe. Hardly ideal if the writer wishes his stars to survive their encounters with the villain. Meanwhile back at the main plot, why does Herr Zahl have a devolving pit, especially one whose effects disappear the instant the subject is removed from the pit? The answer is: to provide a trap from which Robotman can help the Titans escape, and after which the TT will be ready to leap immediately into battle, and partly, to allow a bit of business wherein Starfire's race is shown to be feline rather than primate in background. The best individual scene was the healing of M. Mallah by Raven. The worst was the out-of-the-blue reappearance of Steve Dayton. When last seen, Dayton was either in Africa or possibly, though not shown, on board the Titan's jet tracking the floating island. If the former, how did he get to the Baltic coast? If the latter, why didn't Zahl's men drag him to the island along with Robotman and the TTs? And if he was on the island, how did he avoid getting blown up at the end? In fact, the whole idea of such a huge hunk of land flying over Central Europe without disturbing the forces of NATO and the Warsaw Pact is so silly that at the very least, Zandia should have been located elsewhere. At best, the whole flying fortress notion should have been scrapped.

The most interesting point in this issue was the treatment of the question of how super-heroes treat their enemies. The placement of the Titans side-by-side with the Brotherhood of Evil gave Wolfman a chance to show how our heroes do not slay their foes, even when they are demonstrably bloodthirsty murderers like Zahl and his army. While this is a worthy goal, the story as written came across a little heavy-handed. Everything was just too pat. We are to have a contrast between the Titans and the Brotherhood. Therefore, there must be a host of foes for The Brotherhood to slay, and the Titans to spare. Moreover, so the reader doesn't get too distressed at the deaths of Zahl's army, they must be shown to *deserve* death; hence the muderous invasion of Zandia. But, lest that slaughter be too distressing to the reader's sensitivities, Zandia is revealed to be a nation composed entirely of vicious criminals lorded over by cruel mercenaries, protected by twisted murderers." (p. 3) But for all the deliberateness of the set-up, there were still slips—the Titans were not so innocent as they would have us think. Starfire was slaying some of her foes (issue #14, p. 23, '24); Cyborg surely, if indirectly, caused the deaths of the soldiers who crashed while diving at him (#15, p. 15), and none of the Titans seemed perturbed that *all* the foes they had so carefully KO'd clearly *died* when the floating island blew up, and they made no effort to rescue any of them. Now I wouldn't condemn the Titans for this by any means, but if so much emphasis was to be placed on their mercifulness, some mention of the irony of the situation should have been made. I strongly suspect that one of the motivating factors in the heavy underlining of the Titan's attitude toward killing is the Phoenix/Wolverine controversy at Marvel. After all, once upon a time, *all* heroes had some sort of code against killing, whether stated, as in the case of Superman and the Legion of Super-Heroes, or unstated. On the other hand,

in the World War II, pre-Code days, blowing away one's foes was standard procedure. Only recently has the situation become ambiguous, and I suspect that Wolfman wanted to put in his side of the issue.

Obviously, from the title of the next issue, though, there is a more important reason to confront the question of heroic mercy of the lack thereof in this book than simply its topicality. That reason is the character of Starfire. One of the general lessons to be derived from looking at the entire run of *THE NEW TEEN TITANS* is that the greatest success of the Wolfman/Perez team has been in creating a set of characters with appealing and likeable personalities who mesh well as a team. Even Cyborg, who had appeared to be the odd man out at first, was deliberately developed into an integral part of this group. But there is still a problem with Starfire. At great length it has been established that Starfire belongs to a culture where emotion is prized above reason, where violence is an accepted part of life. In a recent interview (*COMICS FEATURE #12/13*), Marv Wolfman indicated that Starfire's attitudes were based on those of the Japanese samurai. That poses a major difficulty. If Starfire were simply an all-American girl who happened to have a violent nature, it would be one thing to persuade her to moderate her views. But she is not the product of Terran, Western culture. All the values that she has been taught indicate that slaying a vicious enemy is something to be proud of. So far, she has been restrained by the desire to please her friends on her new home world. It cannot last forever. It is obvious that the creative team intends to confront this problem head on. It is not obvious that they will be able to handle the incredibly knotty ethical problem that is involved. How and if they manage to do so will be one of the criteria for whether the second year of the Titans is as successful as the first.

The other two major themes that emerge from the first year of the Titans have to do with the plotting. Wolfman and Perez have done an excellent job of drawing major plotlines out of the background of the Titans—the "*Trigon*" series from Raven, the "*Clash of the Titans*" for Wonder Girl, and the "*Avenging of the Doom Patrol*" from the Changeling. Each of these stories was significant for the characters involved, and produced important changes in their lives: Raven freed from the bonds of both her father and Temple Azarath, Wonder Girl forced to recognize her own limitations, and Changeling freed of the grief associated with his step-mother's memory. They have also shown a considerable dexterity in handling the "human interest" portions of the series, both in issue #8 and in the lesser vignettes that have appeared in other issues. However, the issues that have featured more standard super-hero situations (issues #2 and #10 with The Terminator, issues #3 and #7 with Dr. Light) have been rather lackluster. Teams as powerful as the Titans demand foes which will present a worthy challenge. It has not been demonstrated that Wolfman/Perez can do this on a regular basis. And the number of epic plots which flow naturally out of the Titans backgrounds are limited. So far as I can tell, only two major plotlines of this type remain to be delved into: the secrets of Wonder Girl's parents, and the Starfire/Gordanians Citadel connection. Changeling and Raven have had their "big" stories already, while Robin, Kid Flash and Cyborg have no great mysteries in their pasts. Granted, Trigon can always return, but the history of *MASTER OF KUNG FU* has proven the difficulties of a book where most of the plots simply mark time between reappearances of the book's Big Villain. That book has also shown how much can be accomplished with strong characterization even with weak plots. Similarly, it might be that *TEEN TITANS* could get by on the basis of character development alone. However, *TNTT* is designed to be a more-or-less standard super-hero strip as compared to *MOKF* and the book's overall strength would be greatly enhanced if the creative team could get more mileage out of the stories in between epics. I think the New Brotherhood of Evil shows promise, so the outlook is not bleak.

The other point related to plotting is more of an out-and-out weakness, and that is the recurring sloppiness of some of the plots. The unexplained disappearance of Thia to facilitate the "*Clash of the Titans*" story was a major loose end (and while perhaps intentional, it still seemed sloppily put aside) while the mess of the "*JLA/Fearsome Five/Trigon*" sequence had plot holes you could drive a herd of cattle through. Such laziness is very annoying. It seems as though the plotters set themselves a goal and don't care how much logic has to be trampled to get there, whether the goal is the seduction of Wonder Girl by a god, or having the Titans fight the Justice League.

If these last points seem excessively negative, I've slanted them to that side only because it is so easy to heap paeans of praise on *THE NEW TEEN TITANS*. Marv Wolfman and George Perez are producing what may be the most enjoyable book on the market, a fine mixture of the epic and the light-hearted, without excesses on either side. Only against such overall quality do the flaws of the title stand out. Since the current sales future of the book looks so rosy, it's worthwhile to point out the book's bad spots so that we fans can look forward to still greater quality for some time to come. ●

WALLY, THANK YOU. THANK YOU FOR
I--I THINK I'M ALLOWED TO COME WITH YOU ALL.
WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO, MORE, FRAN? WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
I DON'T KNOW, WALLY. BUT I'LL SURVIVE.
I'M ALIVE! I'M ALIVE AND I'LL DO JUST FINE
I--I THINK YOU WILL, FRAN...
I'M SURE YOU WILL...
25

"...it might be that *TEEN TITANS* could get by on the basis of character development alone."

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DICK TRACY is full of life today thanks to its writer Max Allan Collins (who is interviewed elsewhere in this issue) and artist Rick Fletcher, who was the longtime assistant of *TRACY*'s creator, the great Chester Gould. After the extraordinary heights Gould reached in the 1930s and 1940s, the strip began to slump badly in the 1960s. Like *THE SPIRIT* at the end of its run, *TRACY* turned into a science fiction strip and went to the moon. A race of lunar humanoids with antennae who could shoot laser beams from their fingers joined the series, and Tracy's adopted son Junior married the lunar ruler's daughter Moon Maid. Despite Gould's stylistic exaggerations in drawing his characters and the caricatured aspects of his villains, the strip's strength had always been its basis in a grim, violent urban reality, with which the lunar superhumans and their futuristic science hardly fit. In the 1970s the series moved away from the moon connection, but all the sense of freshness was gone. The characters seemed wholly one-dimensional, the art looked too confined and static, and suspense was absent. Trying to involve myself with the stories in the 1970s *TRACY* strips is like trying to lay hold of an object under a glass plate: I could see it there, but it was impossible to make contact.

Fletcher and Collins made their debut in 1977 with what remains their finest *"Tracy"* story to date, the saga of the campaign of vengeance launched against Tracy by Angeltop, the chic but murderous young daughter of the deceased underworld assassin Flattop—who was perhaps the greatest *"Tracy"* villain of the 1940s. (This story is available in a Tempo Books paperback.) The tale began with the long overdue return of that Dickensian eccentric, the lovable ham actor Vitamin Flintheart, who had been missing from *TRACY* for years but has now become a regular member of the cast. Flintheart was immediately wounded, plunging the story into an ever thickening atmosphere of danger, tension, and indeed, desperate fear, as Angeltop and her accomplice, the son of another old time villain, the Brow, swiftly stalked their next targets. Flintheart's shooting was followed by Angeltop's attack on Tracy's beautiful, self-reliant policewoman colleague Lizz, who has taken prominent roles in Collins' stories, and finally by Angeltop's sadistic attempt to drown Tracy in the very deathtrap where her father perished horribly. Angeltop's savagery was paralleled by her desperation at being inevitably entrapped in her hiding place by the avenging police; many of Gould's most memorable sequences depict his once-confidently-secure but still dangerous criminals ignominiously on the run. The contemporary references were there, too: Angeltop first appeared on television, attempting to sell her book "proving" a police conspiracy to blacken the name of her "innocent" father. The storyline ended with disturbing grimness. The forces of law had won, and all of Angeltop's intended victims were alive and well, but everyone had lost to some degree as well. Angeltop herself had—apparently—been killed, but Tracy was aware that she might still be alive, plotting a new attack; the Brow's son was released on a legal technicality, infuriating Tracy; in losing his partner-in-crime, meanwhile, Brow, Jr. had also lost his lover. Just as early in the narrative Angeltop had thrown a memorial wreath out onto the water where her father had died, the story concludes with Brow, Jr. doing the same in tribute to her, reminding the reader of his own loss and awakening suspicions whether he will try to avenge her as she tried to avenge her father.

Much like Leonard Starr on Harold Gray's *ANNIE*, Fletcher made the art on the new *TRACY* a blend of the old and the new. The characters are drawn very much in Gould's style—are they conceivable in any other?—and so, indeed, are the settings, but the sense of confinement is gone. There is much more spaciousness to the art than there was in the strips of the last decade. Fletcher has brought to visual realization some wonderful new Gouldian caricatures and grotesques, such as the comically slimy-looking agent Pushy Pointer, the gnomelike Art Dekko, and the eerie Torcher, whose hair and eyebrows seem to burst into flame. A particular Fletcher success is his depiction of the murderous fan Ownley Chylde, a pudgy, balding, childlike but sinister 21-year-old who resembles a perfect blend

between an overgrown baby and a cherubic old man.

Fletcher's facial expressions are usually very broad. If a character is startled, his whole head seems to shake; if a character is amused, he shuts his eyes, opens his mouth as far as possible, and breaks out in a profusion of smile lines. But every so often, Fletcher comes up with a very effective use of subtlety: take the glint of insanity in the eyes of Torcher and Pointer at the height of their evildoing (1/2/81 and 4/29/81), the forlorn look of Pointer's victim, the actress B. U. Tiffil, after one of his threats (4/29 again), the tiny scowl when Chylde goes into a snit (8/6/81), or the way in which the object of Chylde's unwanted affections, Sparkle Plenty, ranges in facial expression among uncertainty, determination, glee, and sincere sympathy in a sequence in which Chylde requests and is granted a meeting with her. Fletcher's talent for broad gesture and expression certainly serves him well in handling Sparkle's hillbilly-like father, B.O. Plenty, whom he portrays very amusingly indeed.

Fletcher is best of all at composition. There is something about the way in which he poses and arranges his figures that for me consistently makes *TRACY* the most striking-looking strip on the daily comics page.

Collins has taken *DICK TRACY* back to the basics. Early on he did away with the moon business for good: Moon Maid was blown up by a bomb set by criminals, and her appalled father cut off all contact between his race and Earth. The focus is once again on Tracy's war with colorful criminals engaged in realistic crimes. Some of the villains he has created are standouts. Unlike many comics writers, Collins knows how to give a comedic aspect to his villains without allowing them to degenerate into being outright clowns; he understands that what makes them funny also can make his villains more unnerving. A good example is 1979's Breakdown, the ultimate in manic depressives. His split-second shifts from being an arrogant, efficient criminal mastermind to becoming a helpless, trembling nervous wreck and back again were certainly amusing, but also underlined the depth of the inferiority complex that motivated him, and his mental instability. 1981's Ownley Chylde is another fine creation: an amoral baby in an adult's body who will strike back at anyone who tells him no, and who obsessively collects things—toys, comics, cars, dolls, and, he hopes, a woman on whom his attention has fixated—in order to stave off his fears of loneliness and helplessness, which takes the form of his terror of the dark. Indeed, Chylde and Breakdown are, at bottom, much alike.

Collins has a strong sense of *TRACY*'s traditions and history, as clearly demonstrated by his affectionate uses and revivals of old characters. Gould's *"Crimestopper's Handbook"* on the Sunday page has been replaced by Collins' and Fletcher's *"Dick Tracy's Rogues Gallery,"* which serves as an ongoing lesson in the history of the series both in strip form and in the movies as it recalls past *"Tracy"* adventures through spotlighting their villains and suspects.

Collins also has a sense of proportion, and tones down what were the ideological extremes of the series, again, much as Starr does with *ANNIE*. Tracy is still a firm believer in law and order: on the demise of the assassin Nick Nissassa ("assassin" spelled backwards, of course), Tracy comberly declares "The man who died tonight brought his death on himself. He killed people for a living, and it caught up with him." (2/6/81) But Tracy no longer attacks the courts for (horrors) acknowledging that criminals have legal rights too, as Gould had him do, and Collins as well in his first story. It is noteworthy that now Tracy shoots to wound, not to kill; it is a far cry from the dark days in the 1970s when Gould had Tracy use the lunar space coupe's lasers to disintegrate a boat carrying criminals and then pridefully breathe in the gaseous remains (1).

Crime prevention is still very much part of the strip; indeed, now, instead of leaving it to a corner of the Sunday page, Collins will devote an entire week of dailies to some easy-to-take didacticism on the subject. In 1981 Tracy gave a press conference after the Torcher affair to recommend anti-arson legislation, lectured at the Iowa State Fair on thwarting burglars, and spoke on television on how farmers could protect their equipment and grain after foiling an attempted robbery of just that sort at the farm of his reformed adversary, the Mole.

Collins also has a strong sense of wit, which lightens what could be a wearyingly grim strip. Trying to lure one-time country-western child singer Sparkle Plenty out of retirement, Vitamin Flintheart informs her that "A gentleman out East says you can be *bigger than Slim Whitman!*" (6/17/81) B.O. Plenty tries to draw a distinction between acting, which he asserts lacks "Dibnigity" (as he spits out the window) and country-western singing, which is, of course, true "culture." (3/2-4/81) The Mole, a killer long years ago, is surprised at the idea that he might be robbed: "I hadn't thought of that—I guess there *are* dishonest people in this old world—" (9/10/81). Even an in-joke may turn up: a thinly disguised version of SCTV's parody horror movie host Count Floyd shows up as the manager of the house of horrors in which Tracy entraps Ownley Chylde.

Collins can devise exciting climaxes for *TRACY*, such as Torcher's crashing his

HOW'S IT FEEL TO BE 50, BOSS?
YEAH—HOW'S IT FEEL TO BE AN OLD MAN?
HE'S A MERE LAD!
HAPPY BIRTHDAY!
THE FIRST DICK TRACY SUNDAY PAGE APPEARED OCT. 4, 1931. THE FIRST DAILY STRIP APPEARED OCT. 12, 1931.
CHESTER GOULD CREATOR
RICK FLETCHER ARTIST
MAX COLLINS WRITER

stolen car into a dead end at one hundred miles per hour (1/5/81), and stunningly unexpected plot twists, as when two ongoing subplots suddenly crossed when the pursesnatcher Willie Wheeler made off with the ransom money to be paid to Breakdown, thereby throwing both Tracy and his scientist friend Diet Smith into great danger. The best sequence of this sort in 1981 came after Pushy Pointer, battling with Tracy atop a bridge amidst a thunderstorm, blinded him with gravel. Pointer threw himself towards Tracy to push him over the side. The next panel showed a figure hurtling off the bridge in extreme long shot to the ground far below. The final panel revealed the disheveled Tracy standing at the bridge, gazing solemnly downward (5/12/81).

My one serious complain about today's *TRACY* is that moments such as these come far too seldom. Sometimes the narratives seem to move at a snail's proverbial pace, but there is more to the problem than this. Collins likes to use villains who have never really had to deal with the police before (like art thieves Art Dekko and Sue Reel), small-time crooks (rural thieves Bull and Dozer), and outright amateurs at crime (Push Pointer, Ownley Chylde, skyjacker Quiver Trembly). None of them is a match for a crimefighter of Tracy's experience, and so as soon as Tracy finally comes into conflict with them, they get captured. When the Mole finds himself being robbed by Bull and Dozer, he confidently beams, "But they don't know *Dick Tracy's* in here—" (9/20/81), and lo and behold, the Mole's optimism is justified when Tracy captures both with no trouble at all, just as Ownley Chylde had proved to be a pushover but a few weeks earlier. The strip needs more villains like the hardened criminals and master criminal strategists of all, who can give the heroes a run for their money. My favorite Collins/Fletcher *"Tracy"* stories center on villains of this sort: the one returning the sadistic Gould villain of old, Mumbles; the Angeltop affair, which placed Tracy in extreme danger of death; and the Breakdown caper, in which Tracy was taken hostage and had to find a means of escape. The great 1930s and 1940s villains could and did entrap, evade or outwit Tracy and the police; it was a real struggle to stop them. Moreover, there was the fascination of the glimpses Gould provided of the workings of his criminals' minds: the depths of their hatreds, their cold-bloodedness towards using violence, their willingness to betray and exploit other criminals, their fears of capture, their cleverness in coming up with ways to escape capture. There was as well the psychological struggles of the basically decent men who found themselves involved in the activities of these hardened criminals. Collins' 1980 story about Willie Wheeler, the young black pursesnatcher who is trying to steal enough money to send his ailing mother to Arizona, and who turns hero at the end, was charming and pleasurable. But Willie was depicted as always being rather saintly, robbing only for a Good Reason, and easily made the switch to the Straight and Narrow. Compare him to the anguished husband trying desperately to break free of Gould's Purple Cross mob in the 1930s, and eventually being put on trial for being involved with the gang he now detests. The Collins/Fletcher *"Tracy"* stories are masterful entertainments, but so far they do not match the artistry of the best of Gould's own morality plays in *TRACY*. They could. Collins has proved himself expert at creating a world of constant danger, dark evils, and moral dilemmas in his novels and, to a lesser extent, in his *"Ms. Tree"* comics series in *ECLIPSE*.

On the other hand, Collins has successfully brought a new element to *DICK TRACY* that was rarely so evident in Gould's time, and that is the element of personal warmth. Although the Dick Tracy of the 1930s was a man who was obviously very much in love with Tess and clearly fond of Junior (then only a child) as the years went by Tracy increasingly seemed defined solely by his image as Square-Jawed Crimefighter. Collins has again humanized Tracy by giving him back his personal life. His wife Tess is a prominent member of the cast, accompanying Tracy to performances given by Flintheart, B.U. Tiffil, and Sparkle Plenty, on his trip to the Iowa State Fair, and on his visit to the Mole's farm, all in 1981. An entire storyline in 1979 centered on Tracy's and Tess' visit to their grown daughter Bonnie in Washington State, and climaxed with Tess' giving birth to their new son after being taken temporary captive by two criminals. Tracy is now presented very much as a family man, who gives father advice to his adopted son Junior, either warmly friendly (1/21/81) or stern (6/1/81) as circumstances require. We also get to see Tracy when he is not on the job and having a good time, as on his vacation (long overdue, as Tess points out) to Washington State, or at the theatre, or visiting his "old friend" the Mole. Tracy, with a certain amount of reluctance, to be sure, even lets his hair down enough to adopt western garb when he attends one of Sparkle's performances (7/3/81), and in early October he was given a birthday party.

Tracy has been shown to have emotional vulnerabilities, like any other man, despite his otherwise usual granite-jawed demeanor. He suffered from a sense of total helplessness when the pregnant Tess was abducted in 1979, and he was clearly desolated after scientist Diet Smith put an end to their longtime friendship that same year (the friendship resumed

YOU'RE RIGHT, TRACY. I'M FEELING SORRY FOR MYSELF, WHEN IT'S SPARKLE WHO'S IN THE JAM...
LET'S GO SIT WITH GERTIE AND B.O." TRACY SUGGESTS. "THEY LOOK LIKE THEY COULD USE SOME SUPPORT—"
DOCTOR—COME QUICKLY!

after Tracy risked his own life to save Smith from Breakdown in 1980).

Tracy has also turned out to be, astonishingly enough, a man with a sense of humor. He disguises himself as Bull, walks up to Dozer, simply raises his gun and the brim of his hat, revealing his identity, and smiles as Dozer realizes the jig is up. Better still, he likes to turn the villain's own catchphrase against him once the latter is caught. Pushy Pointer, practically mummified in bandages after his fall from the bridge, snarles that now he will have to go to jail. "Well, Pushy," smiles Tracy, levelling his finger right in the now befuddled agent's face, "it seems you finally *got the point!*"

All of this in fact reinforces Tracy's effectiveness as the embodiment of the Compleat Crimefighter. When Tracy makes a pronouncement on crime nowadays, it is not just a cardboard symbol of Law and Order speaking; it is a recognizable human being who relates to the potential victims of crime as a *fellow* human being.

Collins does not simply make the reader care about Tracy and his literal family, but about what has become Tracy's large "extended family" as well. Collins brings out the good humor of Tracy's co-workers Sam and Lizz, showing them to be not just colleagues but close friends (see for example Sam's good-natured joshing of Tracy about his fame, and Lizz's merry reaction, in the 10/5-6/81 strips). Smith and Flintheart are clearly close friends of Tracy's; indeed, the Tracys named their new son "Joseph Flintheart" after Vitamin, in honor of his heroism in rescuing Tess from her captors. Fletcher and Collins obviously have a great deal of fun dealing with B.O. Plenty (as well as with Plenty's wife Gravel Gertie), but they drew sympathy for him too as he mourned the loss of his deceased sister and worried as his daughter Sparkle, shot by Pointer, lay on the verge of death. It is a severe disappointment that Collins did not show how Junior and Sparkle came to fall in love during the course of the B.U. Tiffil affair, but it is commendable that he has gotten them engaged to be married.

The "family" extends even further. Collins and Fletcher worked up a great deal of sympathy for Sparkle's cousin, B.U. Tiffil, who, despite being a top Hollywood star, emerged as a forlorn, confused young woman, devoted to her friends and loved ones, but caught in a web of intrigue she could not comprehend. There is the likeable Willie Wheeler family, too. Furthermore, just as B.O. Plenty and Gravel Gertie were once criminals before becoming Tracy's friends, so too the Mole has entered the "extended family," having been "cured of crime" by his two decades in prison, and turned, in Tess' words, into "such a nice old man."

Collins' *TRACY* stories center on threats to one or more members of the "extended family": the punks kidnap Vitamin and the pregnant Tess, Dekko captures Lizz, Quiver Trembly threatens to blow up a plan carrying Tracy, Tess, and their baby, Pointer shoots Sparkle, and Chylde tries to prevent her marriage to Junior by killing him; Breakdown kidnaps Smith, and so forth. For that matter, one might observe that Diet Smith succumbed to the cloning hoax perpetrated in 1979 by Mumbles and Dr. Zy Ghote because of his desperate desire for a son, and that Angeltop and Brow, Jr. were out to avenge their own relatives. The family is clearly an important concern of Collins, as

I'M FEELING MUCH BETTER TODAY—HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN HERE?
ALL NIGHT.
THAT'S THE BEST MEDICINE IN THE WORLD, FOLKS.
NO ARGYMENT, DACY.

is evident here, in Ms. Tree's search for her husband's killer, in the real and surrogate father-son relationships in his "*Nolan*" novels, and the rather unusual familial relationships in his "*Quarry*" novels.

The result is that Collins' *TRACY* villains are not merely victimizing the faceless community of the Big City; they are directly attacking a community of people we have come to know and care for, that of Tracy, his family, and his friends. Tracy's extended family embodies the love, good fellowship, and security that the criminals' evil threatens to destroy, and the extended family stands for us, our family and friends, all of whom could be victimized by criminals in real life. Gould himself was quoted in the October 12, 1981 issue of *NEWSWEEK* as complaining that today's *DICK TRACY* had turned into "a soap opera." But it is the latter-day emphasis on the "family's" personalities that increases reader involvement when one of the "family" is threatened, and that gives the strip much of its day-to-day appeal. It was very many times thrilling to watch Tracy in action, but now it is a pleasure simply to be in the company of Tracy, his family, and his friends.

Or to put it another way: keeping up with the Collins/Fletcher *DICK TRACY* and the Starr *ANNIE* is my sole reason for buying the *THE NEW YORK DAILY NEWS* every day. I will not miss them if I can help it.●

YEAR IN REVIEW 1981

by Gerry Clark

Last year, when Chris Claremont and John Byrne wrapped up the Phoenix saga in *THE X-MEN*, they were producing what was arguably the most popular comic book on the stands. Despite critical damnation—and, indeed, it has become almost fashionable to knock *THE X-MEN* in the fan press—the book was selling tremendously, and fans were becoming increasingly enamored with Marvel's mutant team.

But, once one reaches the top of the heap, where does one go? With *THE X-MEN*, the answer has been slow in coming, and it's not a reassuring one.

X-MEN #138 was basically a flashback issue wherein Scott Summers reflects on his life with Jean Grey, and in effect relates the history of the X-Men. This issue also introduced two new elements that would help set the tone for the coming year: the re-introduction of Kitty Pryde, and the departure of Cyclops.

The next two issues featured Wolverine, Nightcrawler, and Alpha Flight, but also added two new aspects, as Storm replaced Cyclops as team leader, and the Angel returned to full-time duty.

Storm was the natural choice for leader, mostly due to the inappropriateness of putting any of the others in charge. (In fact it seems to me that of all the X-Men, only Cyclops, the Banshee and the Beast showed any potential for leadership.) But, despite her probable weaknesses in strategy and tactics, Ororo became a forceful and emphatic leader.

Despite a lack of power, Angel is a visually-exciting character, with a brash personality that could play well off the other X-Men. It seemed natural to bring back a character from the "old" series now that Cyclops, Phoenix and the Banshee had gone, but Warren should have been given some motivation to return. Was he bored in New Mexico? Did Prof. X ask him to return to add some stability to the team? Since the creators didn't seem to know why he was there, Angel just drifted through the next ten issues, participating very peripherally.

This was unfortunate; Warren is a rich, powerful industrialist who is well-known to the public. He could have added a lot to the story-lines if used properly; but, like the Banshee (another underused character), the Angel was allowed to languish, and was dropped.

X-MEN #141 and *#142* were the high point of the series' run in 1981, as the X-Men from a devastated future struggle to change history. The two-parter was stark and moving, and only the dullness

of the new Brotherhood of Evil Mutants kept the story from being a complete success. Despite that one flaw, it is a powerful piece of work.

Around this time, Marvel announced that artist John Byrne would be leaving the strip. Bad news, indeed; inker Terry Austin and Byrne were probably the slickest, most recognizable team working in comics at the time.

Byrne's farewell was a Christmas special starring Kitty (Sprite), and this was followed by a fill-in issue featuring Cyclops in a solo adventure.

X-MEN #145 showcased the return of the co-creator (with Len Wein) of the new X-Men, penciller Dave Cockrum. Paired with him was inker Josef Rubinstein. Both are fine artists, but the finished product was nowhere near as sleek as the Byrne/Austin collaborations. But as the X-Men floundered through three confusing issues fighting Dr. Doom, it became apparent that Byrne would be missed as much as co-plotter as an artist.

The Doom storyline featured Arcade, Murderworld, and every old X-Man that was available. Though Arcade is supposed to be Doom's prisoner, he never acts it. Though Doom has no reason to trap the X-Men, he appears to do so. And who was that in Doom's metal suit? The Victor Von Doom *I* remember would not fall in love at first sight with *anyone*. . . much less the leader of a group of super-heroes who appear to be attacking his castle for no reason.

This characterization of Dr. Doom literally came out of nowhere. . . and should be returned there. His character is well-established as an imperious monarch who'll brook no insolence. He'd just never behave like that!

Sprite, Storm, and guest stars Dazzler and Spider-Woman shine in the next issue, where they do battle with a new mutant who's taken a liking to Kitty. Caliban is the new "villain," and he's strong and. . . uh. . . he dresses badly? Actually, we don't learn much about him, and it's just as well. The issue seems hastily done, but rumor has it that it was a last-minute fill-in job, so perhaps it's best forgiven and forgotten. This issue did, however, re-unite the Banshee with his long-lost daughter, Theresa. Introduced in Spider-Woman's own book, Tracy was the "new Banshee" that Claremont had promised, although her codename turned out to be Siryn. Unfortunately, both father and daughter disappeared immediately, and have not been heard from since.

The running sub-plot in this issue and the next is the Angel's growing concern that Wolverine is uncontrollable. By issue #148, it became apparent that Claremont and Cockrum were going to deal with that conflict by dropping Warren; an odd choice since Logan himself had expressed his own fears that he may run amuck. Too bad. . . the X-Men will obviously have to face this problem sooner or later—but obviously not while Chris Claremont feels he can get additional mileage out of the "will Wolverine lose control?" sub-plot.

While the X-Men fly to Antarctica to check out Magneto's fortress there, Scott Summers and his boss, Lee Forrester, stumble upon the gentleman in question in the Atlantic Ocean. Thus, the stage is set for Cyclops' reunion with his team and the X-Men's showdown with the Master of Magnetism in *X-MEN #150*.

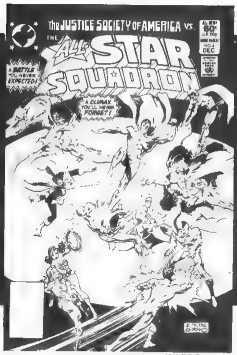
But waitaminnit! Who is this benevolent stranger with the magnetic powers? Surely Chris can't expect us to believe that Magneto—who has sworn to kill the X-Men and subjugate all of mankind more times than I can remember. . . suddenly would change his personality to the point of offering condolences to Cyclops, or a "golden age" to mankind!

Claremont did it again. . . grafted a brand-new persona onto a well-established character. Magneto has always been ruthless, cruel and petty in his previous appearances, and no motive was shown for a change of heart. It just doesn't work. . . so the story doesn't work, either. I can't help but wonder why Claremont is playing fast and loose with all these characterizations all of a sudden. . . did John Byrne keep that aspect of his writing under control?

I can't say for sure—but Claremont's scripting, which I've always enjoyed in the past, has been nothing short of rambling these past seven months. Byrne's departure may have been just coincidental, but regardless of the reason for the slip in quality, it seems evident that *THE X-MEN* is nearing the edge of a precipice. A major change is needed. . . or this once-fine book is going to plummet into the abyss.●

YEAR IN REVIEW 1981

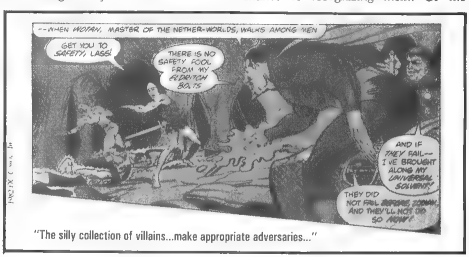
by Kurt Busiek


the JUSTICE SOCIETY OF AMERICA vs.
THE ALL-STAR SQUADRON
A BATTLE TO THE DEATH CONTESTS!
A CLOAK! YOU'LL NEVER FORGET!
1982 DC Comics Inc.

ALL-STAR SQUADRON debuted in 1981, with a special preview in *JUSTICE LEAGUE #193* and a three-issue origin story. Why DC decided to publish a series like this is not exactly clear, since Roy Thomas' previous World War II-based comics series (Marvel's *THE INVADERS)* did not reach issue #50, and at DC, both *FREEDOM FIGHTERS* and *STEEL* did nowhere near that well. *"The Justice Society"* as well had folded both in *ALL-STAR COMICS* and *ADVENTURE COMICS*. But apparently, Roy Thomas wanted to do the series for the heck of it, and the DC management decided to give it another shot, just for fun—and that's what *ALL-STAR SQUADRON* is: fun. The period feel lends the series a charm which blends well with Thomas' wit, making the series an enjoyable read, if nothing else.

For those who might not know, *ALL-STAR SQUADRON* details the adventures of a bunch of DC's Earth-Two heroes during World War II. More than just another super-team, the group depends heavily on the period, with Thomas getting as much mileage out of it as he can. He makes sure to plot in 1940s radio reports, early-model televisions, accurate period airplanes—even a famous football game to show 1940s paraphernalia and backdrops. He has the characters mention scrap metal drives, the March of Dimes, etc. and even goes so far as to mention celebrities of the day (like Bob Fuller and Sammy Baugh). Not only does he wax nostalgic about the times, but the comics of the era keep popping up. Thomas has described some aspects of plotting for *ALL-STAR SQUADRON* as "playing with microfilm," and it shows. Such things as the fact files on the villains, or the copious references to 1940s comics (complete with month and year of publication), or Solomon Grundy's fate in #3 (which was clearly thrown in to off-handedly explain away an inconsistency in comics chronology), point out Thomas' rooting around in old comics for his story material, as does the collection of obscure villians he dug up for the origin story.

Some of the heroes that have been featured in *ALL-STAR SQUADRON* have been quite enjoyable, while some others seem rather out of place. Thomas has wisely refrained from using the Earth-Two heroes with popular Earth-One counterparts, as with Superman and the Flash. Hawkman and Plastic Man are the only two who have any sort of "name" and they're plenty, since a big part of the series' appeal is the reappearance of the lesser-known heroes. Hawkman and Plastic Man are also good choices, not being so famous that readers will be confused at the duplication of characters, but well-known enough that readers will have a chance of recognizing them. Of the

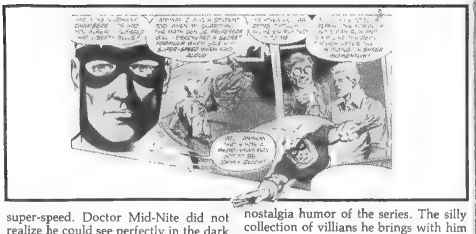

--AHEN KHOTAH, MASTER OF THE NETHER-WORLDS, WALKS AMONG MEN
GET YOU TO SAFETY, LASS!
THERE IS NO SAFETY FOR FROM MY VENGEFUL BOLTS
AND IF THEY FAIL--I'VE BROUGHT ALONG MY UNIVERSAL SOLVENT!
THEY DID NOT FAIL. BEFORE DOWN, AND THEY'LL NOT DO SO AGAIN!
1982 DC Comics Inc.

"The silly collection of villains...make appropriate adversaries..."

lesser-known characters, Liberty Belle and Johnny Quick are the most enjoyable and interesting. The budding romance between the conceited Quick and the aloof Belle keep sparks flying in the series, and their forceful personalities (especially Quick's) dominate the others. The Atom has come in for a good bit of exposure, which is to be expected, since he's been mentioned as Thomas' favorite. Just *why* he is Thomas' favorite is a mystery, though. He has no powers (though that situation may change), nothing particularly striking about his personality, and one of the most truly hideous costumes to come out of comics' Golden Age. Anybody who runs around in brown undershorts pulled up around his ribcage, with a blue sock over his face, is in trouble, and the yellow chest-exposing T-shirt with red lapels and the bare legs don't help any.

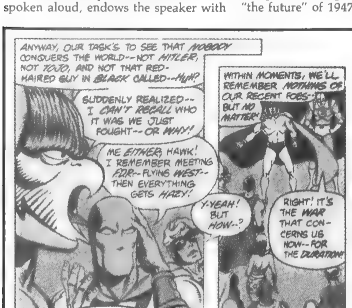
Still, for all the Atom's sartorial rebellence, the character who fits least well into the All-Stars is the Shining Knight. The idea of a tenth-century hero in modern times is a potentially fascinating one, but to stick such a hero in a period piece about the 1940s doesn't give the character enough room to be properly handled, and disrupts the period flavor of the series.

The origins of the heroes are fun. Rather than having convincing or dramatic origins, the All-Stars seem to work on the principle of "the sillier the better." And they have some real doozies: Johnny Quick's math professor (and guardian) discovered a mathematical equation, which, when spoken aloud, endows the speaker with



super-speed. Doctor Mid-Nite did not realize he could see perfectly in the dark until an owl took a wrong turn and crashed through his living room window. He could see the lamps, the drapes, even the window itself, but thought himself blind until he could see this bird. And Liberty Belle's origin involves, of all things, the defacing of a national monument (her belt buckle is carved from the Liberty Bell itself), and a faithful helper who periodically rings the Liberty Bell (does anyone notice? Why don't they arrest him?), which gives her an adrenal rush. In a present-day comic, these origins would be horrible, but the nostalgic feel of *ALL-STAR* makes them part of the series' charm.

The origin story works pretty well for a team like this: FDR himself calls together the heroes, and they face (and thwart) a pseudo-Hitler named Per Degaton, rescuing the Justice Society in the process. Degaton has come from "the future" of 1947, which adds to the nostalgia humor of the series. The silly collection of villians he brings with him (Solomon Grundy, King Bee, the Monster, Sky Pirate, Wotan, and Professor Zobar Zodiak) make appropriate adversaries for the revival heroes. But the ending of the story nearly torpedoes the whole thing. Since it is a time travel story, it ends with the convenient comics cliche of having the heroes forget what happened, so when they meet the villains years later, they won't recognize them. Maybe it had to end this way, but how long is a team going to stay together when they can't remember the battle which brought them together in the first place? An origin story that no one can remember is a pretty big handicap.


ANYWAY, OUR TASK IS TO SEE THAT NOBODY CONQUERS THE WORLD--NOT HITLER, NOT YOU, AND NOT THAT RED-HAIRED GUY IN BLACK CALLED--HUH?
SUDDENLY REALIZED--I CAN'T RECALL WHO IT WAS WE JUST FOUGHT--OR WHY!
ME EITHER, HAWK! I REMEMBER MEETING YOU--FLYING WEST--THEN EVERYTHING GETS HAZY!
WITHIN MOMENTS, WE'LL REMEMBER NOTHING OF OUR RECENT ROBS--BUT NO MATTER!
YEAH! BUT HOW--?
RIGHT! IT'S THE WAR THAT CONCERNS US NOW--FOR THE DURATION!

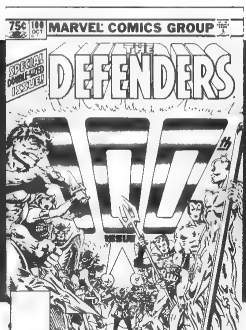
"An origin story that no one can remember is a pretty big handicap."

Rich Buckler's art for the series is its worst point. His standard collection of Adams-esque swipes sometimes results in plain poor storytelling and busy graphics. His Per Degaton doesn't even look *short* most of the time (and yes, he is supposed to be short). Furthermore, his style is inappropriate to a series set during World War II. I would much prefer someone like Alex Toth, Frank Robbins, or Don Heck, who could make the series convincingly old-fashioned, while still telling the story well. Unfortunately, none of them were available (or acceptable to the already-chosen staff). At least Kubert is doing the covers, though. Jerry Ordway's inks are a saving grace, combining as they do a Zip-a-Tone and pen slickness (which will make him popular with the fans who go for Bob Layton and Bob McLeod) with an old-fashioned look that works well for the series.

The future (not 1947 this time) looks promising for *ALL-STAR SQUADRON*, with Adrian Gonzales taking over the artwork. His work looks to be much more appropriate for the book than Buckler's. So with Thomas, Gonzales, and Ordway (not to mention Wein) at the helm, the series is off to a good start, and may manage to outlast all the WWII series that have preceded it. ●

YEAR IN REVIEW 1981

by Chuck Huber



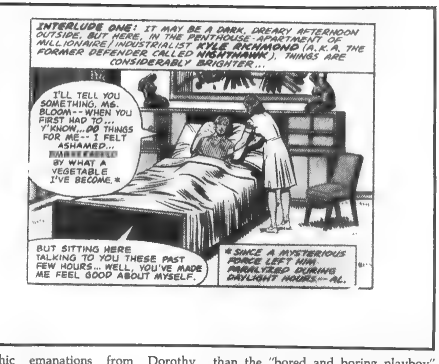
For some time prior to 1981, *DEFENDERS* could best be described as a whole host of characters in search of a direction. Unlike the Avengers or the Fantastic Four or the X-Men, the Defenders were from the beginning (in *MARVEL FEATURE #1*) a loosely structured team with no obvious reason for existing. Therefore, the Defenders more than any other super-group required (and still require) a writer who has a strong sense of the characters involved, and of the direction that the "non-team" is headed. Steve Englehart and Steve Gerber—each in their own way—provided such direction with strong (if bizarre) plots. Even after Gerber left, there were a few sequences that managed to maintain the series' distinctive flavor, such as the appearance of Scorpio and his new Zodiac, and the "*Xenogenesis*" series. But more recently there had been a disastrous decline, reaching its nadir in the "*Secret of Spider-Man's Statue*" issue (*DEFENDERS #61*) and the ghastly "*Membership Madness*" three-parter in which not only did the regular Defenders get dragged through the mud, but most of the second-banana heroes in the Marvel Universe as well. However, this year, an attempt was made to attack the main problems besetting the book. Unfortunately, the results were mixed at best.

One of the problems has been what to do with the Hellcat. As introduced by Steve Englehart (in *AVENGERS #144*), she was light-hearted, and interested in super-heroing for the thrill of it, as well as out of a desire to be like the colorful heroes she admired. She was not, however, empty-headed. That was what the "happy-go-lucky, hunk-lovin' " Hellcat had become. In *DEFENDERS #89*, a drastic step was taken. Patsy Walker's mother, who had not even been mentioned in the course of Patsy's super-heroic career until the previous issue, was killed off. While I don't care for the practice of introducing characters only to kill them off, nor for the trend of all female super-heroes to come from unhappy family situations (see also Ms. Marvel, Dazzler and She-Hulk for corroboration...), this move made a certain amount of sense. The estrangement of Patsy and her mother did explain why Hellcat had never mentioned her family before, and the reason for the rift—Dorothy Walker's attempt to turn Patsy into a child star—provided a plausible explanation of the *PATSY WALKER* humor/romance comics in the context of the Marvel Universe. This addition to her background could explain Patsy's tendency to act like a spoiled child; she had been raised as a model of adolescent fantasy. All in all, it seemed a promising development, depending on how the post-trauma Patsy Walker was developed.

Unfortunately, the further development of Hellcat became entangled with J. M. DeMatteis's "*Six-Fingered Hand*" plot. In *DEFENDERS #94*, Patsy is possessed by the demon Avarrish and turned against the Defenders. Distressing to be sure, but not likely to do any lasting damage to the character. But at issue's end, it is revealed that Patsy was promised to the Hand by her mother! This is radically different from the concept of Dorothy Walker introduced by Messrs. Hannigan and Kraft four issues earlier—their Mrs. Walker was merely domineering and possessive, and insensitive to her daughter's real needs and desires, but Mr. DeMatteis' version is truly sinister and hateful. Where the former would have provided ground for Patsy to reflect on her past and on where and why her personal relationships (with ex-husband Buzz Baxter as well as her mother) have gone wrong, the latter could only spawn shock and horror.

And there was worse to come. Patsy's "possession" became a major sub-plot, culminating in the revelation in issue #100 that her father was Satan himself. Though by issue's end, Hellcat was freed from the actual domination of the devil, she was left with the memory that all her "normal" life had been little more than an illusion.

Now it is true that DeMatteis deliberately left open the possibility that all of the above revelations about Patsy's parents were simply Satanic lies to manipulate the Defenders into doing the devil's ultimate bidding. Even Daimon Hellstrom's investigation of the


INTERLUDE ONE: IT MAY BE A DARK, DREARY AFTERNOON OUTSIDE, BUT HERE, IN THE PENTHOUSE APARTMENT OF MILLIONAIRE/INDUSTRIALIST KYLE RICHMOND (A.K.A. THE FORMER DEFENDER CALLED NIGHTHAWK), THINGS ARE CONSIDERABLY BRIGHTER...
I'LL TELL YOU SOMETHING, MS. BLOOM -- WHEN YOU FIRST HAD TO... Y'KNOW... DO THINGS FOR ME -- I FELT ASHAMED... BY WHAT A VEGETABLE I'VE BECOME.
BUT SITTING HERE TALKING TO YOU THESE PAST FEW HOURS... WELL, YOU'VE MADE ME FEEL GOOD ABOUT MYSELF.
SINCE A MYSTERIOUS FORCE LEFT HIM PARALYZED DURING DAYLIGHT HOURS -- AL.

psychic emanations from Dorothy Walker's grave might have been controlled from afar to produce misleading results. But until and unless the "secrets" of Patsy pasts are definitely revealed to have been fabrications, any kind of light treatment of the character becomes senseless. Granted, the "airhead" image had to go, but there was no reason to shatter the character and remake her in the grim mold of all *too* many Marvel heroines.

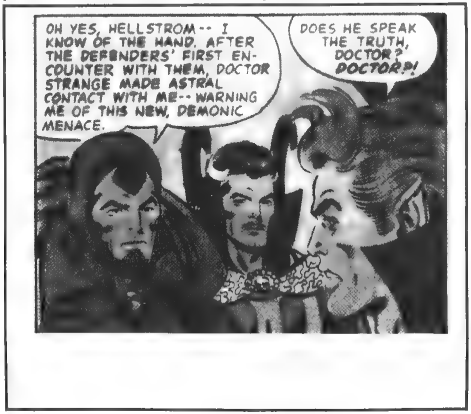
Another of the problems has been what to do with Nighthawk. Kyle Richmond was in need of even more drastic reworking than Patsy Walker. Steve Gerber had begun the process of defining Richmond as a not-very-capable person. However, as issue after issue went by, he did not undergo a rebirth, but instead became further and further mired in incompetence. Nighthawk tried to lead the Defenders in Dr. Strange's absence, and failed—repeatedly. Kyle Richmond found himself under government investigation, and the writers of the series dragged it out for years. (Though it has apparently been resolved at last in *DEFENDERS #103*, there are still loose ends.) He has quit the Defenders and abandoned super-heroing more than once. Kraft and Hannigan had attempted to breathe new life into the character by beefing up his weaponry, but that was the wrong approach. What Nighthawk needed was not enhanced powers, but a sense of why this man was the stuff of which heroes are made. Try as they might, the Kraft and Hannigan Nighthawk came across as nothing more than the "bored and boring playboy" whom Roy Thomas had introduced as a super-villain in *AVENGERS #10*. Merely having enough wealth to commission super-weapons from an industrial complex does not confer virtue. So, in *DEFENDERS #93*, DeMatties gave Kyle Richmond a real handicap to strive against, as opposed to the lesser problems which the character had been whining about for so long. Richmond is totally paralyzed from the neck down, a condition which we learn (in #95) goes away after dark, making him now truly a Nighthawk. In a not unnatural reaction, he decides to give up the Defenders in #98. Despite being dragged back into the mess by Satan's machinations in #99, he reaffirms his resolve in in #101. However, from his leading role in issue #102 and his continuing cover billing, it is apparent that the character will not be allowed to fade away...unfortunately. In my opinion, the super-heroic career of Kyle Richmond should have been allowed to end long ago. His new disability makes him a trifle more sympathetic, but even less motivated. Granted that there appears to be more development in store, the effects so far are negligible.

Another of the hallmarks of the Defenders in their glory days was the highly variable lineup. The use of Daredevil in #89-91 was an example of the effective use of the technique. Daredevil became involved in the story naturally, by virtue of his alter-ego's role in Kyle Richmond's legal defense. The Mandrill is a foe whose powers made him a reasonable challenge for the Defenders as a whole, yet not so overwhelmingly powerful that Daredevil could not contribute. The following issue was also enjoyable, as DeMatteis surprisingly made the notion of Eternity needing help into a plausible plot, and made effective use of those two occasional Defenders, Daimon Hellstrom and Prince Namor. However, the subsequent use of guest-stars in the "*Six-Fingered Hand*" series gave mixed results. True, Ghost Rider, Dracula and the Man-Thing are appropriate characters for a mystical adventure. However, I tend to agree with the faction (Marv Wolfman among them) that says that Count Dracula perished once and for all at the hands of Quince Harker in *TOMB OF DRACULA #70*. While his interaction with Hellstrom and the question of honor were intersting, the occasion was not sufficient to justify the return of Dracula. The appearances of Ghost Rider and Man-Thing also turned out to be just throwaways, irrelevant to the main plot. DeMatteis evidently forgot Dr. Strange's encounter with the Ghost Rider in *GHOST RIDER #29-31*, and his last encounter with Ted Sallis in *MAN-THING #11* (2nd series). The biggest objection to the use of these characters is the same objection which arises with respect to the use of the Hulk in this series: the Defenders have it within their power to *cure* each of these misfortunates of their respective curses. Daimon Hellstrom (in issue #96) effortlessly submerges the Ghost Rider into Johnny Blaze, and implies that he could have exorcised the demon completely. Surely the combined might of Hellstrom and Dr. Strange would have suffiiced. Similarly, I find it hard to believe that Dr. Strange and the Silver Surfer could not pool their mystic and cosmic resources to free Ted Sallis once and for all from his muck-encrusted prison. While the Nexus of Realities may need a guardian, and there may even be some well-hidden cosmic purpose for the Ghost Rider, the obligations of simple compassion, I think, would argue for a cure. Only the external obligation not to eliminate viable characters keeps them from doing it. As a result, scenes like the one in issue #98 occur, wherein Ted Sallis *begs* Dr. Strange not to try to cure him, because he couldn't stand the pain of possible failure. Oh come now! If Sallis has chosen to remain the Man-Thing *out of cowardice*, the tragedy of his situation is permanently cheapened.

At this point, a little digression is in order. DeMatteis has wisely opted to make minimal use of the Hulk in the series. This is quite a departure from recent times when the Hulk would be

cover-featured despite little (or even no) appearance in the actual story. The exclusion of the Hulk from routine stories is good for two reasons. First, it is very hard to effectively use the Hulk as a team member. That is especially so now that the emphasis in the Hulk's own title has shifted from the monster being merely a childlike brute who wishes only to be left alone, to that of a creature of extreme emotions, who *can* be child-like and compassionate, but who is always balanced on a knife-edge, ready to topple into murderous rage. Second, the argument used above with respect to the Ghost Rider and Man-Thing applies with even greater force to the Hulk. The Silver Surfer has the power to cure Bruce Banner. In fact, he did so—twice!—in *INCREDIBLE HULK #250*, only to undo his work in a moment of mindless despair at issue's end. Now the Defenders are Bruce Banner's friends. Every time the Hulk appears with the group, the question must arise: why don't they call on the Surfer to cure the Hulk once and for all? The real answer is that the Marvel business office would stage mass executions of everyone involved in killing off one of their top-selling strips. In this case, though, there is a genuine internal reason for the Defenders to hesitate. It has been established that the Hulk and Bruce Banner are indeed two separate personalities (*INCREDIBLE HULK #237*). The various Defenders are friends of the Hulk as well as of Banner. Is curing Banner the same thing as murdering the Hulk? There are the seeds there of a truly epic plot, with considerable intellectual and moral implications, were the Defenders to really confront the problem of Robert Bruce Banner vs. the Hulk. (Of course the final decision is predetermined by sales figures, but the fun is in the how and why of getting there.) But until someone decided to resolve this question in the depth it deserves, the Hulk is best kept away from the Defenders most of the time.

Of the guest-stars who actually joined the ranks of the Defenders, the Devil-Slayer probably fared the best. The character was introduced in, of all places, the Deathlok strip in *ASTONISHING TALES*, a notion which only makes sense because it was Rich Buckler, creator of Deathlok, salvaging a character created by Rich Buckler as "Demon Hunter" for the defunct Seaboard/Atlas group. The "*Xenogenesis/Rebirth of the Demon Race*" plot originated in that series was ultimately resolved in *DEFENDERS #58-60*. Like the Count, the biker and the muck-monster, Devil-Slayer was suited to return in a supernatural tale. Unlike them, his reappearance in #97 benefitted from a tale which was a direct outgrowth of the character of Eric Simon Payne. It appears that the Devil-Slayer will be around for some time to come. Since the character has the beginnings of a complex background, and room for development, and since the character is visually interesting, with a combination of minor mystical powers and combat ability, he can fit in well in a wide range of plots and should be an asset to the group.


OH YES, HELLSTROM -- I KNOW OF THE HAND, AFTER THE DEFENDERS' FIRST ENCOUNTER WITH THEM, DOCTOR STRANGE MADE ASTRAL CONTACT WITH ME -- WARNING ME OF THIS NEW, DEMONIC MENACE.
DOES HE SPEAK THE TRUTH, DOCTOR? DOCTOR?!

I don't have the same positive feelings about the Gargoyle. Though, as many readers have pointed out, the notion of a senior citizen super-hero is unique, where a writer can go with this has not become apparent to me. Since the character just had his "turning point" in issue #103, perhaps the Gargoyle will be turned away from his annoying, self-conscious humility to something a bit more dynamic. Since the visual aspect of the character is so poor (suits tailored by the pathetic Toad...), it may have caused me to unfairly prejudge the character as a whole. But I doubt it. The Gargoyle looks like another Nighthawk; one who will be in need of constant tinkering and never quite make it.

The final character who was spotlighted in the "*Six-Fingered Hand*" series is the character who turned out to have the pivotal role: Daimon Hellstrom, the Son of Satan. I was quite happy to see Daimon return in issue #92. As developed in his own magazine, Hellstrom was not concerned so directly with the sort of silly "super-hero vs. Satan" bits that he was initially aimed for, but rather as an intellectual mystic like Dr. Strange who happened to have a "raging spirit that dwells within." Indeed, in many ways, I believe, Hellstrom is the best of Marvel's Jekyll-Hyde characters. All are victims of the same struggle of inner good and evil as all men write large, but only Hellstrom could retreat to the situation intellectually with both halves of his personality—unlike the Hulk, who only understands his situation as Bruce Banner, or the Ghost Rider, who is brainless in either personality (it might be noted that I don't care for the Ghost Rider). So my pleasure increased as it became apparent in #93 that Daimon was going to be with the Defenders for a long stretch, and still more so in subsequent issues as DeMatteis displayed considerable skill in handling the character, according to the criteria above. He was portrayed as having the greatest understanding (next to Dr. Strange) of the threat of the Hand, and a deep mixture of compassion and gentleness (the scenes with Hellcat and Dolly Donahue in issues #95-96), with impatience and contempt (his reaction to

SHOULDERS SAGGING, TEARS MISTING EYES THAT HAVE NEVER KNOWN TEARS, THE MASTER OF HELL TURNS.
R SE DEFENDERS -- WHOLE AGAIN. YOU HAVE WON. YOU HAVE UNLEASHED THE LIGHT N DARKNESS' HEART. IN MY HEART.
FOR I AM THE EMBODIMENT OF DARKNESS -- AND EVEN I CAN KNOW THE LIGHT... OF LOVE.
EVEN I.
YOUR WORLD IS YOURS AGAIN -- AND SATAN MUST RETURN TO HIS.
THERE IS MUCH TO PONDER.
FATHER-DAIMI?
I AM NOTHING BUT DARKSOUL NOW, FATHER. I BELONG NOWHERE ON EARTH.
I BELONG ONLY BY YOUR SIDE.
TAKE ME WITH YOU.

David Kessler and his flock in issue #97).

Imagine my dismay then on reading issue #100. For it is with issue #100 that the whole *"Six-Fingered Hand"* storyline suddenly became distasteful, on several levels. First of all, Marvel has not had that good a track record with stories dealing with the Devil. The confrontations of the Silver Surfer, Dr. Strange and Dracula with various manifestations of Satan were memorable. The rest have ranged from dismal to abysmal (no pun intended). The problem confronting a writer is that Satan is the distilled essence of evil, so the plotting has to be worthy of the villain's power and magnitude. A bad plot featuring the Terrible Tinkerer is merely boring; a bad plot feature Dr. Doom is distinctly painful to read; a bad plot using Satan as the antagonist is devoid of redeeming social value. In this case, the plot of the *"Six-Fingered Hand"* is confusing and makes no sense, *unless* the whole point of it was to get Dr. Strange to combine his power with that of the other Defenders to unleash Daimon Hellstrom's Darksoul. In which case, Satan triumphed over the heroes.

Consider: if the plan really was to weaken the dimensional fabric, so as to allow the merger of Hell and the terrestrial plane, then the only Defenders who *had* to be manipulated were Dr. Strange and Devil-Slayer. Involving Daimon Hellstrom (by allowing him to encounter a student who had learned of the Hand, as told in flashback in #94) was pointless at best and counter-productive at worst. Similarly, there was no point in kidnapping the Surfer, Namor, the Hulk and Clea in #98, or in allowing the Defenders to fight their little contests in #100, or to declare them the winners after allowing Hellstrom to live, and thereby abandon Earth. Similarly, if Patsy Walker were really Satan's daughter, or really crucial to the conquest of Earth, then returning her to the Defenders was pointless. Granted, rationality in antithetical to the Devil, and sadism is as important as tactical considerations, but this seems an excess of illogic.

On the other hand, if the whole scheme were aimed simply at exhausting, confusing and working the Defenders to fever pitch, so that at the proper moment they would betray Daimon Hellstrom, then everything comes together nicely. The manipulation of Hellcat even fits as a device to disorient Daimon himself, and to possibly cause him to fall by slaying the "demonic" Hellcat (as he almost did in #100). The other Defenders drawn in in issue #98 were included because it would take their power added to that of Dr. Strange, Valkyrie, Devil-Slayer and the Gargoyle to submerge Hellstrom's human soul.

Beyond the violation of the Comics Code in this triumph of evil, and the spoiling of the character of Daimon Hellstrom in the process, there are still other flaws which became apparent in issue #100: If Satan's plot was aimed at his son, there should have been clues to the reader before the final denouement. Only after several re-readings of the whole continued story did the explanation which made sense out of the scheme become clear. Without it, all the garbage about *"Hell on Earth,"* the six days six hours and six minutes needed to consolidate the change, and the notion of Satan loving his son just stand there as a messy mixture of bad plotting and worse theology. Even more annoying on first reading was the portrayal of Dr. Strange—how naive and stupid could one be to suppose that unleashing the Darksoul could be desirable. Stephen Strange should be more knowledgable than that. The same goes for the Silver Surfer, who should be experienced in the ways of Mephisto. The sorceror supreme and the sky-rider should spend the next few years kicking themselves father than zooming off in #101 for R&R in an African village. All in all, *DEFENDERS #100* ranks as one of the increasingly large number of Marvel comics in recent memory that one wishes could simply be expunged from history.

But I haven't given up hope on the title yet. We are promised more delving into Valkyrie's background (hopefully an antidote to the "Val in Valhalla" debacle), Hank McCoy's arrival should be good for character interaction with Patsy, and the saga of Daimon Hellstrom *may* not be over yet. The evidence of a year's worth of work is that Marc DeMatteis has the right

instincts for the *type* of development the Defenders need. The actual execution, though, has run the gamut from superb to execrable. Perhaps such a writer is more perilous; in the sense that his work is much less likely to be boring or innocuous or forgettable than that of someone who just goes through the motions, but that it is also less certain that favorite characters or themes will survive intact. *DEFENDERS* is now a title that I always look forward to reading, even though there may be issues in the future (like #100) that I dread re-reading. ●

YEAR IN REVIEW 1981

8 STORIES ★ ALL NEW!
★SUPERGIRL ★ LOIS LANE ★ JIMMY OLSEN
★ MR. AND MRS. SUPERMAN ★ CLARK KENT
DC SUPERMAN FAMILY
Introducing the LATEST EVILON to JIMMY OLSEN, LOIS LANE, CLARK KENT, and SUPERMAN!
WHAT IN THE WORLD CAN IT BE?
...AND WILL HE/SHE/IT DARE?! MARRY HOMETOWN PERFECT SUPERMAN!?

by Rich Morrissey

This title is perhaps the most unfortunate example of what can happen when DC's editorial staff tries to use an unpopular comic book as a "dumping ground" for writers and artists it doesn't have much respect for. In some cases, including here, there can be pleasant surprises in the offing—but, in all too many other cases, the writers and artists who can't get any more "prestigious" assignments do very little to gainsay the editors' lack of faith in them.

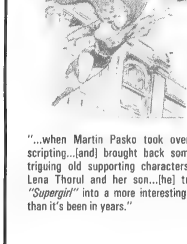
After spending the first two years or so after its conversion to all-new material in a state of flux, *THE SUPERMAN FAMILY* has stabilized its format with five regular features. Supergirl has, rather surprisingly, settled down as the lead feature—surprisingly because her past success has been erratic at best, and she lasted fewer than ten issues of her own title (as opposed to well over 100 for both Jimmy Olsen and Lois Lane). But even the better stories of departed scripter Jack C. Harris were beginning to show a definite direction, as she departed her old Florida haunts for an actress' job (even if it was a bit too contrived to have a director just happen to overhear her, I doubt she'd have gotten the position if she *hadn't* had previous experience and some education in the dramatic field) in New York. A rather overused setting, but not so much at DC as at Marvel—and one developed even better when Martin Pasko took over the scripting. He's brought back some intriguing old supporting characters like Lena Thorul and her son, combined them with new ones and some original plots, and turned *"Supergirl"* into a more interesting strip than its been in years. I only hope his announced replacement, Paul Kupperberg, can maintain his level of creativity—he'd be off to an excellent start if he could introduce or revive some interesting regular villains. (Some past villains who come to mind as candidates for revival are Black Flame, Durkla, Nasthalthia, Vortex, Zond, and (most likely with a new name) Starfire—the fact that most current readers would be hard-pressed to identify any of these speaks volumes fo Supergirl's general lack of truly effective regular adversaries.) Her art could also stand improvement—Win Mortimer is an acceptable penciller whose association with the character dates back to 1969, but there isn't much left to his figures when Vince Colletta get through with them.

"Mr. and Mrs. Superman," on the other hand, is my personal favorite strip in the book. Golden Age buff E. Nelson Bridwell has had a field day bringing back heroes and villains who no longer fit into the Earth-One legend, and although he's handicapped by his small page count and rather static domestic setting (why *can't* Lois have a baby?) he's brought most of them off in superb style. But he ought to have a different artist—Kurt Schaffenberger is literally more suited to *any* other strip in the book (having been a regular—and superlative—artist on *"Supergirl," LOIS LANE* and *JIMMY OLSEN* in the past) than to this one. Although I applaud the attempt to distinguish this alternate Superman by his chest insignia, Schaffenberger does *not* draw it right (as a glance at almost any pre-1948 issue of *SUPERMAN* will demonstrate)—though his old-style Lois is perfect. One artist I'd like to see do at least a fill-in on this strip is Berni Wrightson, who's expressed his interest in drawing a Golden Age-style Superman and Lois in the past.

On the other hand, I find myself with very little to say about the *"Private Life*

of Clark Kent" stories by Bob Rozakis and John Calnan. They aren't bad stories, but they rarely contain anything of much real interest—although the concept is so narrow that I can't really blame them too much. Still, the strip *has* been a good one in other hands (notably those of writers Cary Bates and Martin Pasko, and artist Curt Swan), so perhaps a change of personnel would be in order here, too. I understand there's been a script by Al Schroeder III bought that's been sitting on the shelf for several years; I for one would like to see it.

Next is Lois Lane, who's been bounced around between so many writers (Gerry Conway, Marv Wolfman, Paul Levitz, and now Tamsyn O'Flynn) that it's a wonder she has any sort of continuity at all. It's been truthfully pointed out that Lois has, of late, been much more interesting as a supporting character in Superman's stories than she has in her solo adventures. Social changes have rendered unacceptable original conception as a character whose main *raison d'etre* was to get into trouble from which Superman would rescue her, and in order to give Lois credibility as a solo heroine, the writers have been forced to largely excise Superman from the stories so he *won't* rescue her prematurely when she gets into the inevitable trouble. This



"...when Martin Pasko took over the scripting...[and] brought back some intriguing old supporting characters like Lena Thorul and her son...[he] turned *"Supergirl"* into a more interesting strip than it's been in years."

CLARK, IT'S HIGH TIME YOU AND LOIS MET HARVEY AND GILDA KENT--ESPECIALLY SINCE YOU HAVE THE SAME LAST NAME.
HARVEY.. KENT?!?
AND WHEN THE OTHER KENTS HAVE CHATTED A FEW MOMENTS AND MOVED ON...
HARVEY KENT*--THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY WHOSE FACE WAS SCARRED BY ACID-- AFTER WHICH HE BECAME THE CRIMINAL TWO-FACE!*
YES--HE LATER SURRENDERED, HAD PLASTIC SURGERY, AND REFORMED!
* THE EARTH-ONE TWO-FACE IS NAMED DENT-- JWB

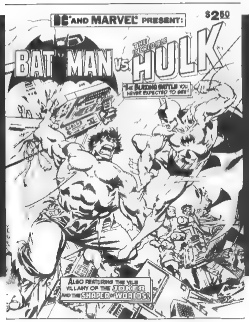
"Golden Age buff E. Nelson Bridwell has had a field day bringing back heroes and villains who no longer fit into the Earth-One legend..."

in turn makes the most interesting facet of her personality—her convoluted relationship with Superman/Clark Kent—impossible to explore in depth. Of course there are other things to explore, and other things that can happen to an active investigative reporter—but so far, the writers haven't been very successful in conveying them. Again, the introduction of some new sub-plots, like Tom DeFalco's series involving the Human Cannonball, would be very good for the strip.

Jimmy Olsen, whose book this was before it changed its title in 1974, is facing similar hard times. Formerly a male version of Lois Lane—without the romantic relationship, of course, but equally prone to blundering into difficulties from which only Superman could extricate him—he too is now primarily a solo hero, without even frequent appearances in his friend's title to give him more depth. Fortunately, he's had a slightly better time of it than his *DAILY PLANET* co-worker—thanks to an interesting supporting cast of his own and writers (notably the same one who gave Supergirl a boost: Martin Pasko) who were able to develop that cast, together with Jimmy himself. It's still not as good a strip as it could be, and might benefit from a bit more of the light touch it had in the Mort Weisinger days. Possibly new scripter Paul Kupperberg could get some good ideas from the adventures of that other youthful plain-clothes reporter, Tintin—or even from the wide variety of Jimmy's past adventures, as chronicled by people as diverse as Otto Binder and Curt Swan, and Jack Kirby and Mark Evanier. Jimmy's romantic life has begun to get some attention again (Jennifer has *my* support over the infinitely boring and over-used Lucy Lane) but I wonder what's become of Prof. Phineas Potter, the Newsboy Legion, Tempus, Victor Volcanum, the planet Transilvane, the new Guardian, Dubbilex, the Star of Cathay, and even—Rao help us—the Jimmy Olsen Fan Club? (For that matter, in Jimmy's case it'd hardly be sexist to allow Superman an appearance every so often—especially as his "best pal" hardly appears at all in Kal-El's own strip these days.)

So what's in store for *THE SUPERMAN FAMILY*? From the time it assumed that title and size, it seems to have been one of DC's most successful titles, so evidently the characters' appeal is there. There's really no reason they shouldn't all prove themselves worthy of that appeal, the way *"Mr. and Mrs. Superman"* often, *"Supergirl"* frequently, *"Jimmy Olsen"* sometimes, *"Lois Lane"* occasionally, and the *"Private Life of Clark Kent"* stories barely do. ●

YEAR IN REVIEW 1981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BAT MAN VS. THE INCREDIBLE HULK
THE BLOODY BATTLE YOU NEVER EXPECTED TO SEE!
ALSO FEATURING THE VILE VILLAINY OF THE VICIOUS AND THE STUDLY WHEELIES!

by Paul Dini

In 1976, Marvel and DC presented the first of their super-hero cross-over treasuries, the now-legendary *SUPERMAN VS. SPIDER-MAN* by Gerry Conway and Ross Andru. This past year, two new Marvel/DC treasuries made their debut—the second *SUPERMAN AND SPIDER-MAN* team-up, and *BATMAN VS. THE INCREDIBLE HULK*. While it is a novelty—at least—to see characters from two different comics houses paired up in one book, it is rarer still when that combination sparks an interesting story. Happily, that problem is not apparent in *SUPERMAN AND SPIDER-MAN*, for story-tellers Jim Shooter and John Buscema have labored to bring forth a landmark in story, characterization and spectacle, and in most of these objectives succeeded admirably. The thrust of the plot was another one of Dr. Doom's unending master plans for world domination. To accomplish his scheme, he must utilize the power of Superman's old foe, the Parasite, who in turn must feed off the combined powers of Wonder Woman and the Hulk. Sounds complicated, huh? And don't forget, Superman and Spider-Man were in there too, along with the regular supporting cast from *each* character's respective magazines. Shooter orchestrated the whole affair with style and wit, twisting little character quirks here and there, and generally having fun with what he was writing. As a matter of fact, it was those many "little touches" which made the book the success it was. First, he made each of the super-heroes' alter-egos something more than just a change of clothes by having Clark Kent and Peter Parker switch jobs. As Clark and Parker each work as reporters (to varying degrees) it should be natural that they have mutual contacts in the reporting business. This proved to be the case when Jimmy Olsen recognized Parker when they met in Metropolis and brought Marvel's top-selling hero over to the Daily Planet to work as a free-lancer. Likewise, it seemed just as natural that when Superman flew to New York to check up on Dr. Doom, that Clark Kent should stop in to touch base with Jonah Jameson at the Daily Bugle. So we were treated to a number of clever variations upon such themes as Parker finding the Planet storeroom and remarking to himself that it seems like a great place to change clothes, and Steve Lombard transferring his practical joking to Peter Parker. The sight of Parker wandering through the Galaxy building with an "I struck out with Lana Lang" sign taped to his back is almost reason enough to buy the book.

But *SUPERMAN AND SPIDER-MAN* has a lot more going for it than just the odd chuckle now and then. In addition to a well-paced story, there was some of the best John Buscema pencil work since his Silver Surfer days. His Superman is nothing short of tremendous, being both distinctive *and* derivative of all the better aspects other artists have brought to the character(!). The confrontation scenes between Superman and Dr. Doom, early on in the story, rank as some of the best work in the book. Also, Buscema's Wonder Woman I found had a particularly nice quality, stressing both the feminine beauty and muscular power of the character. It's just a pity she wasn't around for more of the story than her brief, four-page cameo. Still, I find it magical to see Dr. Doom, Spider-Man, Superman, the Hulk, *et al*, together in one story. Marvel purists might carp that Spider-Man is nowhere near to being a physical or mental match for Dr. Doom (and indeed, he isn't), but there is something heroic just in the fact that Spider-Man knows he is out of his league with Doom, and stands up to him anyway. That makes it all the more satisfying when he wins (*albeit* with help).

Not as nearly satisfying is the *BATMAN/HULK* team-up. These two second-most popular characters have been thrown together in a confusing messy hodge-podge for the sole reason that they *are* the second most salable characters after Spider-Man and Superman. The story chores this time around fall to Len Wein and Jose Luis

Garcia-Lopez, and, while the plot is hardly memorable, it must be noted that Garcia-Lopez draws one hell of a fine Hulk, and his presence here as penciller demands more than just a cursory glance for this uninspired effort. The story, in a nutshell, dealt with the Shaper of Worlds, who, suffering from a form of cosmic radiation poisoning, comes to earth and enlists the Joker's aid in finding a cure. The Shaper explains that only a massive dosage of gamma radiation will save him, which prompts the Joker to steal a gamma ray gun and kidnap the Hulk as a possible means for the Shaper's cure. Meantime, Batman runs on, and the Hulk keeps busy destroying everything in sight. The Shaper is cured, and, out of gratitude, gives the Joker the power to do whatever he wishes. This prompts the crime clown to fly away on a magic carpet and—behaving more like a demented Mr. Mxyzptlk than the Joker—tranforms Gothamn City into a kind of freakish Disneyland. This, the book's climax and denouement, was one of the silliest I have ever read. The sight of the Joker skipping around as the Mad Hatter in front of Batman and the Hulk (whom he was just changed into Tweedledum and Tweedledee) was too stupid to take seriously, and destroyed any remaining hope I had carried for the book at that point. But I had trouble accepting the basic premise of pairing up

—WHAT'S TO KEEP ME FROM PEELING AWAY THAT TIN SUIT AND—
BAH. I AM STANDING ON LATVERIAN SOIL—HERE I AM THE LAWS ALIEN—NOT SUBJECT TO VENGEANCE OF THE LAWS OF MEN!

the Hulk and Batman in the first place. Superman and Spider-Man are so mismatched in terms of power they cold actually complement each other by their differences. Batman, at his best, is the coldly logical detective who strikes down criminals by playing upon their fears. The Hulk, at his best (at least, as a heroic character), is a simple-minded creature who uses his great strength to lash out at injustice as perceived in his own limited views of good and bad. The Batman is reason, the Hulk is emotion, and they don't have a whole lot to say to each other. Consequently, the *BATMAN/HULK* book becomes little more than a series of fights and chases, with next to none of the small, inventive touches that made the *SUPERMAN/SPIDER-MAN teaming* such a joy.

As far as future cross-company teamups go, I wish the editors would first take into mind the characters themselves, and their DC or Marvel counter-parts for Batman than the Hulk, and I (personally) would love to see a Captain America/Wonder Woman team-up set in World War Two, with perhaps guest-star appearances by the Invaders and the All-Star Squadron. Maybe next year? ●

What can you *do* with a seven-foot giant with green skin, tremendous muscles, tremendous strength, and not-so-tremendous intellect who's constantly flying into destructive rages? A lot of things, one would think—but when a character's been around as long and become as much of an institution as the Hulk has, not as many as you *might* think. We know the Hulk will never kill anybody, will never be cured, and will never find a lasting friend (except in the Defenders, which by necessity must be largely ignored in his solo stories), but will continue to roam around frightening people, occasionally putting his tremendous power to good use, and every so often reverting to "puny" Dr. Robert Bruce Banner and agonizing over his lot before inevitably losing his temper and turning green once more.

So how to vary this basic pattern? Bill Mantlo decided to expand the range of the Hulk's activity, having him abandon his customary American (or occasionally Canadian) haunts for a world tour. In the course of his travels, he had occasion to meet the super-heroes of other countries—admittedly an idea that's been used before (by E. Nelson Bridwell in *SUPER FRIENDS*) but a very good one. It's about time the comics publishers realized America isn't along in the world in technology any longer, if indeed it ever was—so, if it has so many super-heroes, surely at least *some* other countries should have their own! Indeed, it's an idea that could have been used for a lot more stories than it was—I'd have liked to see the Hulk in Africa (a good opportunity for some new black super-heroes, along with previously established ones like the Black Panther) or China. But either Bill Mantlo was running out of ideas or his editor didn't want to carry the series on too long, so after stops in Israel, Egypt, the Soviet Union, and England (where he ran into Captain America during *his* recent British sojourn), ol' Greenskin was swimming across the Pacific Ocean, finally reaching America after a stop at Easter Island. And if the geography seems a bit confused, and the swim a bit inconsistent with the Hulk's general distaste for water, never fear—better things were ahead.

True, once arriving back in the southwestern United States, the Hulk continued to exhibit his predilection for getting into fights with local heroes like It, the Living Colossus, Red Wolf and the Texas Twister—almost as if Mantlo was determined to show that this country could produce super-heroes even less inspired than some of the foreign ones he'd come up with. But he also had a genuinely moving adventure with a scientist who'd adopted a Dire Wraith child (the first use of this running "*Rom*" plot outside the pages of that magazine, and a good move towards integrating it into the mainstream of the Marvel Universe) and, eventually, a reunion with his oldest friends, Betty Ross and Rick Jones. What could have been yet another half-baked attempt to bring back the past instead became much more as new facets of the characters were explored—such as Rick's own temper, his identification with the Hulk, and the very interesting question of whether a permanent cure for Banner *would* amount to the destruction of the Hulk's own independent personality. Unlike Steve Englehart and some other writers who started their writing careers out brilliantly and have since fallen into a slight decline, Bill Mantlo's creative talents have been steadily improving over the years—and, despite the competent-but-uninspired art of Sal Buscema, Mantlo's version of the Hulk is more interesting than this title has seen in a long time.

***

But an even more interesting approach to the character was taken, not in the pages of *THE INCREDIBLE HULK* at all, but in the color (and, later, black-and-white) magazine that also bore his name. And, incredibly (even for the "*Hulk*" magazine *without* that word in the title) it took a television adaptation to point the way—and Jim Shooter to bring it into comics—before Marvel's other writers even thought of doing what was second nature to the TV writers. Science fiction, fantasy, and larger-than-life characters and situations have come to dominate comic books so much that writers, editors and readers take them pretty much for granted—but rarely since the early days of super-heroes has a hero been treated as the *only* fantasy element in an otherwise-realistic world. Some initial steps in that direction were taken by the book's backup stars, and quite successfully (Moon Knight eventually graduating to his own title, and Dominic Fortune deserving to), but both characters were themselves relatively realistic, with no super-powers and few super-scientific odds and ends.* It's not the sort of approach one customarily associates with a science-fantasy character like the Hulk—and yet the TV series had proved it could be done, and it proved even more effective back in the medium in which the character originated.

For, no matter where Bruce Banner and his alter ego might happen to wander, the one thing that was certain was that they'd shake things up—and there are a great many things that can stand being shaken up, even in the parts of the Marvel Universe that aren't any different from our own. The renegade scientists and alien monsters gave way to homicidal junkies, corrupt politicians, gambling racketeers and the like—types of evil that outraged us even more because they really exist, and that outraged Banner despite his desperate efforts to control himself. Yet Banner, unlike the rest of us, was turned by his rage into a being that, however unthinkingly and often tragically, could *do* something about that evil, and gave the rest of society, in the stories and in real life, a great deal more to think about. It was a direction that was only beginning to be explored, and it's regrettable that it wasn't allowed to last for very long.

Perhaps the handwriting was already

on the wall—the magazine was forced by rising costs to cut down on and eventually eliminate its interior color, and it may very well have ultimately priced itself out of the market. But it has been reported that its cancellation was caused, not by declining sales as is generally the case, but by adverse reaction to its content—in particular, to the now-famous scene in Shooter's story in which Bruce Banner is threatened with a homosexual rape in a New York YMCA. The sequence has been criticized, with some justice, by a number of gay readers and groups who felt that it conveyed a one-sided view of homosexuals, although Shooter has stated that that was never his intention.

But this alone, sad to say, can hardly be responsible for the title's cancellation—if disapproval by the gay community and its supporters were enough to kill a series, Anita Bryant's orange juice commercials would have disappeared from the airwaves far faster than *THE HULK!* magazine disappeared from the stands. What makes that cancellation so regrettable is the role in it not of those who felt that particular story presented too one-sided a view of a given issue but of those who felt it had no right even to raise that issue in the first place. The criticism that led Marvel to cancel the title, I understand, was primarily from people who felt (rightly) that the Hulk was a character with great appeal to children and adolescents, and that his adventures should therefore not be allowed to mention homosexuals, rape, and other things these people consider "unsuitable" not only for their own children but for all youth. Even a fan as publicly committed to the concept of more sophisticated comics as Gary Groth has expressed the opinion that writing such a story about a character like the Hulk would automatically "give it an adolescent context." It's attitudes like these that have a way of becoming self-fulfilling—when even as mildly controversial a matter as the appearance of would-be rapists (and *not* primarily because they were the first openly gay characters ever to appear in a Marvel publication) can result in an abrupt end to such a modest and praiseworthy attempt to extend the boundaries, and the audience, of a given character.

I suppose the Marvel executives can't really be blamed; they have an entire business that might be jeopardized if the idea were to spread that their magazines and characters were "unsuitable" for what, even now, is still a strong plurality of its audience. But I hope that society will continue its evolution to the point where realism is no longer considered "unsuitable" for anyone, despite the last-ditch efforts of such radical Right organizations as the John Birch Society and the badly-misnamed Moral Majority to return to the censorship of yesteryear. And, on a more modest and less political level, I hope the lessons taught by *THE HULK!* magazine will not be forgotten by Marvel, or by comics in general—and that, in particular, the Hulk himself will see more variety, and more realism, in the comic book that still remains to him.

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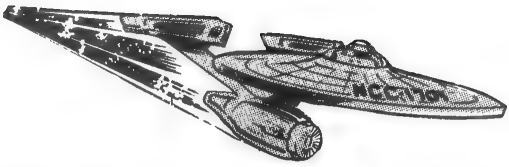

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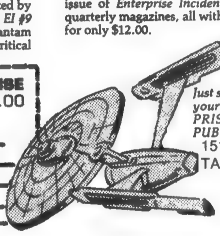

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Animated Antics

by Jim Korkis

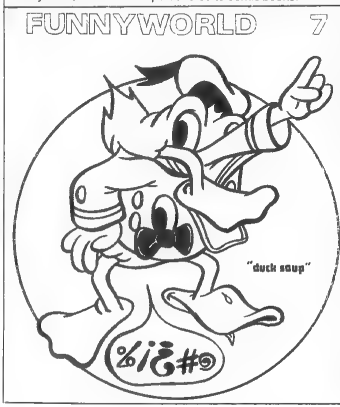
THE HISTORY OF ANIMATION FANDOM.

Once upon a time there was no animation fandom. To include an animation column in a major comic fanzine would have brought an outcry of protest from the readers. Serious fans would have transferred their loyalties to other zines. The birth and early development of an animation fandom are directly related to the efforts of one man and his fanzine.

The mid-Sixties were the Golden Age of Comic Book Fanzines. Besides the Thompsons' COMIC ART, Bails-Thomas' ALTER EGO, and Spicer's FANTASTY ILLUSTRATED, there were countless ditto and mimeo fanzines extoiling the virtues of superheroes. Most of the scholarship centered on superheroes from the Forties although there was a growing faction passionately devoted to proclaiming Marvel Comics as the only worthwhile comics in existence. Funny animal comics were scorned and considered of little value by serious fans. Animation was merely an interesting diversion and like Funny Animal Comics was something for small children. For most fans, the word "animation" merely meant "Disney." Perhaps the more knowledgable fans would have included Warner Brothers and Hanna-Barbera in that definition but precious little else since no information on the field existed in any easily accessible format.

Into this fog of ignorance strode Michael Barrier.

His only credential was an unabashed love for Funny Animal Comics and animation. In October 1966 he published the first issue of FUNNYWORLD for Capa-Alpha, the comic book amateur press association. Capa-Alpha, started by Dr. Jerry Bails, was the first apa devoted to comic books.



That first issue of FUNNYWORLD was fourteen mimeographed pages and the main feature was a listing of the Warner Bros. Comic Books 1941-1966. (Remember this was pre-Overstreet.) Why was the zine christened FUNNYWORLD? In that first issue, Barrier explained, "There was a comic book called Funnyworld, by the way, although I know nothing more about it than it existed, probably briefly, and probably as one of the multitude of rotten funny animal comic books spawned in the early Forties by the success of LOONEY TUNES." Barrier's primary interest was on gathering and publishing information on this unexplored world of funny animals.

Six months later (FUNNYWORLD #5, April 1967), Barrier included his first animation information. At the time, it was a natural extension from his funny animal comic book research since there were many characters based on animated cartoons. Little did Barrier suspect that animation articles would soon displace all talk of comic books. A year later (FUNNYWORLD #9 April 1967), the fanzine had expanded to forty-six mimeographed pages and Barrier was selling the extra copies he printed for fifty cents.

FUNNYWORLD had outgrown its original purpose of being one man's attempt to uncover information about some of his childhood memories; it had become a rallying center for animation fans who had no other source available for this material. Barrier was developing a well earned reputation as an animation scholar and expert on funny animal comics. The Summer of 1970 saw the release of FUNNYWORLD #12. It was the first offset issue and sold for a dollar. The main feature of the almost fifty page issue was a still controversial interview with Bob Clampett. More and more animation news, reviews and interviews began appearing in the pages of FUNNYWORLD. The increased print run and the new ability to include photographs expanded the magazine's reputation. The magazine continued to be published sporadically until issue #16 (Winter 1974-75) which was intended as the final issue. The magazine lost money because it was published infrequently. It was published infrequently because Barrier lacked the necessary resources to publish more often; Barrier decided the only way to remedy the situation was to close up shop.

FUNNYWORLD was revived several years later when the magazine was sold to Mark Lilien, a young New York businessman. By contract, editorial control of the magazine (and copyrights on it) remained with Barrier. Lilien took over the business end which included subscription fulfillment, production, distribution, advertising and all the rest of the necessary business evils. Since Fall 1977, six issues of the magazine have appeared. Barrier recently resigned because of strong disagreements with the way the magazine was being handled. Since that resignation, a new issue has not appeared.

One of the major contributions Barrier made to animation fandom was to stop publishing FUNNYWORLD in 1975. FUNNYWORLD was the unquestioned center for animation scholarship and once it disappeared it forced the development of other magazines to fill the void.

Animation fandom continued to grow and fans desperately wanted more animation information. MILLIMETER, a popular film-tv magazine, published a special animation issue in 1975. The success of that issue caused MILLIMETER to make it an annual event and to eventually incorporate animation articles into each issue. The February 1976 issue of FILM COMMENT which was devoted to animation immediately sold out — and that $1.50 issue now sells for $30!

During this period, a new central forum for animation scholarship appeared. Like FUNNYWORLD, MINDROT started as an apazine. It was created for VOOTIE, the funny animal cartoonists apa. David Mruz, editor and publisher, remembered his school teachers warning him not to read comic books or watch cartoons because they would "rot" his mind, so Mruz created a fanzine for others with similarly rotted minds. The first issue appeared April 1976 and was only two pages long but by the end of the year it had grown to eight pages of offset type devoted to animation and sold to the general public for fifty cents. A favorable plug for MINDROT in Mark Mayerson's short-lived animation column for Film Collector's World attracted the interest of many animation fans looking for a place to share animation information. This influx of interest encouraged Mruz in June 1977 to further expand his fanzine and to develop the present format of the magazine. Physically, it is forty pages in an 8½" by 5½" booklet. Like FUNNYWORLD, the magazine has featured lengthy interviews with animators and historical research. Unlike FUNNYWORLD, the magazine also features detailed episode listings of animated series and several regular columns by animation historians. Some potential readers were confused by the title of the magazine so Mruz changed the name to ANIMANIA by issue #20. Since that change, sales have increased and ANIMANIA appears to have a healthy future. It is a respected and necessary addition to animation scholarship. It is possible to purchase a sample issue by mailing $2.50 to ANIMANIA, David Mruz, 3112 Holmes Av. So., Minneapolis, Mn. 55408.

A few other attempts at animation-oriented fanzines disappeared (such as Reg Hartt's ANIMAZINE) because they could not meet a regular publication schedule like the one established by Mruz and his zine. However, other fannish outlets for animation fans have developed within the last five years.

The Cartoon/Fantasy Organization first met in Los Angeles during May 1977. It was intended to be a monthly gathering of fans to watch rental films and tv videotapes of neglected fantasy films, especially animated cartoons. Gradually the emphasis shifted to Japanese cartoons and the group began making contacts with Japanese sources that could give them access to information, films and comic books. Early in 1979, it was decided to expand the C/FO from a local L.A. club into a national club for those interested in Japanese fantasy and animated cartoons in general. Over a half of the membership lives outside Southern California; many even live outside the United States. There is a monthly bulletin giving information on the various screenings of cartoons across the country, how to obtain Japanese magazines related to animation, and club related business. There have also been six issues of FANTA'S ZINE. (Fanta is the cartoon mascot of the club.) The mimeoed fanzine showcases obscure information on Japanese animation. Fred Patten, long respected for his scholarship in the area of foreign comics, and Mark Merlino deserve primary credit for the early development of this group. More information can be obtained by writing (and enclosing an s.a.s.e.) to: C/FO, 401 South La Brea Ave., Inglewood, California 90301.

ASIFA (The International Animated Film Society) began as a group of animation artists from many countries who met in Annecy, France in 1960 to put together a major animation festival which would do for Annecy what a live-action film festival had done for Cannes. It is now an international organization involved in film festivals, teaching programs, award programs, research and preservation. Within the last few years, the organization has attempted to expand its membership beyond animation professionals to also include devotees of the art. It is possible to subscribe to GRAFFITI, the bi-monthly offset newsletter of the organization which features news, articles and illustrations. Send $8.00 to GRAFFITI, ASIFA/Hollywood, 1258 No. Highland Avenue, Hollywood, California 90038.

APA-TOONS is a bi-monthly apa devoted solely to the discussion of animation. It was started in July 1981 and six issues have been issued so far. Its membership boasts such respected animation historians as Jerry Beck, Fred Patten, David Mruz and Mark Kausler. Hopefully some of the material that appears in this apa will find wider distribution. Further information can be obtained by sending an s.a.s.e. to APA-TOONS, 3433 W. Sierra Vista Drive, Phoenix, Arizona 85017.

Foreign countries are now producing similar magazines for animation fans. France publishes BANC-TITRE ("Animation Stand"), Sweden has STORYBOARD, and Japan has a half dozen different titles like ANIMEDIA. All of them are devoted to the study and appreciation of animation.

Things have changed since the early days of Comic Fandom. Love of animation and funny animal comics is not just tolerated but respected. The works of Carl Barks can command hundreds and sometimes thousands of dollars. Major comic fanzines run regular animation columns. Dozens of new animation companies have sprung up within the last decade to meet the demand for more and better animation.

Animation Fandom continues to expand thanks to the wonders of home videotaping which allows people to collect cartoons as easily as they once collected comics. In fact, Animation Fandom has started to grow so large that smaller factions devoted to one company or one series have appeared. There are organizations concerned just with Disney animation.

Another group concentrates solely on JONNY QUEST while still another prefers to only discuss and collect items connected to BATTLE OF THE PLANETS. In the future there will be even more expansion and some of that credit belongs to a handful of courageous comic book fans who were willing to take the risk of being ridiculed in order to explore the magic of animation.

This column will continue that quest.

Graffiti
The Newsletter of ASIFA/Hollywood
Editor: Bill Scott
L'Animation Francaise: Tout Va Bien!
The animation industry in France after a years-long depression that resulted in the closing of one of its largest studios, Idefix, is enjoying a popular and artistic resurgence, according to ASIFA President John Halas.
Paul Grimault's feature-length film THE KING AND THE BIRD, won the Louis Delluc Prize for 1980, and two other feature films were completed or distributed. In addition, six other feature films are in production including an adaptation of Jack London's "White Fang" (CIDIC-ELANC) and another based on the story of Don Quixote. Some of these are pure animation, and others stop animation. Jean Francois Laguionie whose CROSSING THE ATLANTIC by CAT won the Grand Prix at Ottawa in 1978, has embarked on another project: a feature-length film about a young woman and a nomad tribe in the shifting sands of an imaginary desert, provisionally titled DESERT BARBARI.
The most encouraging change, however, according to Halas, is that feature films made in Europe can now be profitable in their home markets and do not have to depend on worldwide distribution. This has been made possible by increased revenues from TV and home entertainment in individual countries (read Britain, Holland, Hungary, and West Germany are nations which can now support profitable domestic distribution of animation features
(continu page 2)
The President's Newsletter
The following letter is from John Halas, President of ASIFA International.
A highly interesting gathering took place in Czechoslovakia under the auspices of Kratky Film in Prague, when ASIFA's Commission No. 2 — Co-production and Co-operation — met under the chairmanship of Jan Sibrat. Dr. Gyorgy Matolcsy our Secretary General from Budapest, and I from London, attended together with our treasurer, Vladimir Goldman and the head of Kratky Film, Vladimir Vasicivek. This was the Commission's second meeting the previous one being held in Leipzig
(contd. page 2)
Ruby-Spears/ASIFA Pact Kaput
Tatt Orders Artwork Destroyed
In a stunning setback for ASIFA Hwd., historians, archivists, and animation in general, the Tatt Broadcasting Corporation ordered and carried out the destruction of the entire output of animation artwork done by the Ruby-Spears organization before their recent takeover by the conglomerate.
Citing copyright problems and legal questions arising from the use of comical characters in animation, as well as a misunderstanding of ASIFA's goals and programs, Jeff Cook of the Ruby-Spears organization broke off discussions with ASIFA's Judi Cassell regarding their donation of artwork for our archives and cel sales, and proceeded with the destruction of hundreds of boxes of an historic material. No specific figures were ever table but it is thought that hundreds of thousands of cels were involved, representing the animation done on the last dozen Saturday morning TV series.
Cassell, as well as others involved in the acquisition, restoration, preservation, and sale of animation art were shocked both by the abruptness of the action and by the casualness of the decision. Apparently someone at Ruby-Spears received a phone call from an individual (NOT from ASIFA or any of its board members) offering to buy some of the artwork
(contd. page 4)
ISSUE NO. 22
ANIMANIA
The Animated Film Quarterly
$2.00
formerly Mindrot
CRUSADER RABBIT —
THE JAY WARD CONNECTION

STRIP TEASE

Rick Norwood

THE TOP TEN STRIPS

In the perishable pages of your daily newspaper are comic stories as good as the best comic books have to offer. Latigo is as dramatic as Daredevil. Gasoline Alley is as funny as Uncle Scrooge. Garfield is as incouciant as Cerbus the Aardvark. Following are brief reviews of ten of the best.

LATIGO. This violent western by Stan Lynde is the best current adventure strip. It appears daily and Sunday in a handful of papers around the country, such as the St. Paul, Minnesota, Pioneer Press. It has been cancelled by more than one paper because, when he has to, Latigo kills people. This is a no no in Newspaperland — unless, of course, it is on the front page, with pictures. This strip is deeply conservative, in the same way that John Wayne was conservative. Lynde loves self reliance, and he loves the scenic grandeur of the West. He knows that man is a killer — the meanest, most dangerous animal on earth. And that it takes a strong man or woman to live a full life.

In the first daily story a tenderfoot makes his fortune in the gold rush — selling cats. He only sells female cats, and keeps for himself the only tomcat west of the Pecos. Latigo helps him stop some catnappers by putting a wildcat in the bag they think holds the tom.

More recently, the daily strip had an "origin story" about Latigo's adventures during and just after the War Between the States. This story was written by Lynde and drawn by Russ Heath.

The Sunday page does not tell a continuing story, usually, but gives a slice of western life, often having to do with the innate orneriness of horses.

It is a strip well worth collecting, if you can find it.

DOONESBURY Gary Trudeau's strip is as famous as Latigo is obscure. It is, also, as free from censorship as any comic strip is likely to be. When one paper drops the strip because the artist shows two people in bed together, then other papers pick it up. It was praised by President Gerald Ford.

If it were only political commentary, it would quickly lose our interest. It is at its best when Trudeau is ringing changes on his large cast of characters. Joan Caucus's daughter, Joan, Jr., rooms with Honey, from mainland China, and has an exboyfriend named Zeke Brenner. Honey is in love with Duke, ex-Ambassador to China and full time dope fiend. Brenner deals Duke's dope and accidently burned Duke's house down, so Duke is going to kill Brenner. Somehow they all wind up in that dormitory room, and Duke is armed and dangerous.

In the current story, Duke is carrying a boatload of British tourists to the Falklands, so they can watch the war.

The Philadelphia Inquirer is a good place to follow the strip, because it is one of the few papers which does not discard the top line of the Sunday page.

MODESTY BLAISE. This British strip, which runs daily only, was a top adventure strip when Jim Holdaway was drawing it. Now, the artwork (by Colvin) leaves something to be desired. But the strip is still written by Peter O'Donnell and is always worth reading. If you are unfamiliar with the adventures of Modesty and Willie Garvin, you can catch up by watching the new television series which is reportedly in the works. Or, better yet, buy Ken Pierce's reprints of some of Modesty's best adventures, which is to say, some of the greatest graphic stories of all time.

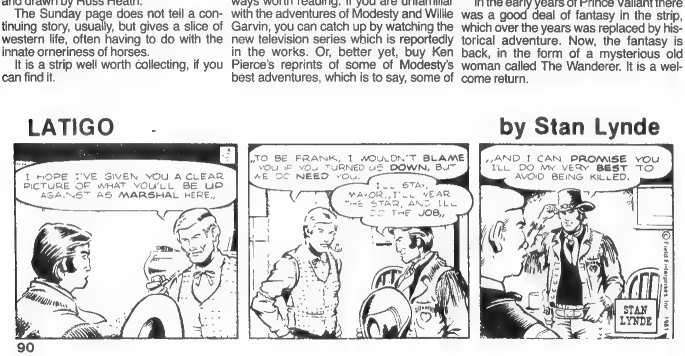
The only American newspaper I know of which still carries the strip is the Salt Lake City Desert News. And they have a nasty habit of making Modesty modest. The British have a healthy appreciation of nudity which their American cousins lack, and someone at the Desert News (or at the syndicate) pencils a crude bra and panties on any strip which shows Modesty stripped.

The current adventure in the US is "The Lady Killers." In England, they are several hundred strips ahead of this. Last I heard, they were running a story titled "Garvin's Travels," in which Willie Garvin is apparently reduced to the size of a mouse. I suspect a hoax.

Oddly, the US version runs an extra strip each week, which does not appear in Modesty's home newspaper. This makes no sense at all, since the strips are numbered, not dated. In any case the syndicate in the US skips adventures and runs stories out of order. Ah, well! Who ever said syndicates must make sense.

PRINCE VALIANT. Since Hal Foster's retirement his classic strip has been written and drawn by the father and son team of John Cullen Murphy and Cullen Murphy. We all miss Hal Foster's beautiful artwork, but it is still a top adventure strip. It is written for adults, but if you are over fourteen you are apt to enjoy it.

In the early years of Prince Valiant there was a good deal of fantasy in the strip, which over the years was replaced by historical adventure. Now, the fantasy is back, in the form of a mysterious old woman called The Wanderer. It is a welcome return.

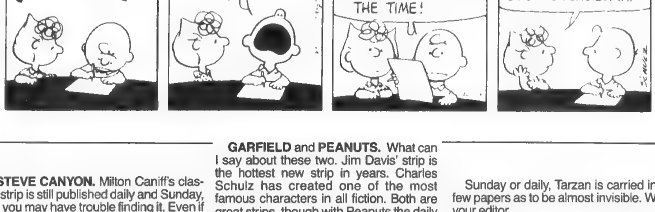

LATIGO
by Stan Lynde
I HOPE I'VE GIVEN YOU A CLEAR PICTURE OF WHAT YOU'LL BE UP AGAINST AS MARSHAL HERE.
TO BE FRANK, I WOULDN'T BLAME YOU IF YOU TURNED US DOWN, BUT WE DO NEED YOU.
I'LL STAY, MAJOR, IT'LL WEAR THE STAR, AND I'LL DO THE JOB.
AND I CAN PROMISE YOU I'LL DO MY VERY BEST TO AVOID BEING KILLED.
STAN LYNDE

Prince Valiant appears only on Sunday. There has never been a daily strip. It is best in the largest available size, which used to be a full page, but is now half page or tabloid. The best paper to subscribe to if you are a comic strip fan is the Sunday Asbury Park (New Jersey) Press. It carries in half page format Prince Valiant, Tarzan, and Star Wars.

GASOLINE ALLEY. This strip has been running for longer than I have been alive, and it has never been better. The Sunday and daily now tell the same story (this was not always the case) and are written and drawn with love and care by Dick Moores. It is a delightful mixture of fantasy, family humor, pathos and high jinx. A good paper to follow it in is the Washington Post, which runs the Sunday small but complete.

Telling a story is the best way to keep the humor alive in a comic strip. No one can do a joke a day and stay funny for more than a few years.

Of all the strips I collect (too many) Gasoline Alley is the one I enjoy the most.



STEVE CANYON. Milton Caniff's classic strip is still published daily and Sunday, but you may have trouble finding it. Even if you find it, the huge cast of characters and the dense diaglog may prove daunting. Its appeal is lasting, but not immediate. I read it in the Richmond (Virginia) Times Dispatch, which runs the Sunday strip they way the artist draws it, ⅓ page. Cut to ¼ page, as it is in many newspapers, it becomes almost unreadable.

Caniff still writes and draws the strip, with the help of assitants. He is one of the greats. In the seventies, however, under pressure from the censors to tone down the "violence" in the strip, the stories became more domestic, and the length of each story was cut from thirteen weeks to eight weeks. There seemed to be strong pressure against anything interesting happening in the strip at all. Finally, Mr. Caniff had had enough, and began writing and drawing the strip he wanted to do, instead of the strip the syndicates wanted him to do. Once again the story became lively and adventurous. We follow several major characters: Stevenson Burton Canyon, his wife Summer, her son by a former marriage Oley Olson, Steve's ward Poteet Canyon, and others. Their stories intertwine and are fully mysterious clues and red herrings: "See yez back in the bush, Lusty Lily!" "Bush? Lusty Lily?"

Recently, a sympathetic female character who had been in the strip for more than twenty years was stripped and tortured, tortured in such a way that she could never bear children. Long time fans of the strip wept for her. Newspaper editors cancelled the strip, with hypocritical cries of excessive violence. Mr. Caniff is to be congratulated for having the courage of his convictions.

GARFIELD and **PEANUTS.** What can I say about these two. Jim Davis' strip is the hottest new strip in years. Charles Schulz has created one of the most famous characters in all fiction. Both are great strips, though with Peanuts the daily is usually better than the Sunday, because it often tells a continuing story. Both strips are reprinted in paperback, but the Garfield paperbacks are done right: complete and in order, while the Peanuts paperbacks are not quite complete, and run the strips out of order.

"I just got comfortable, Garfield. Do you ABSOLUTELY have to be let out?"

TARZAN. If ever a strip had its ups and downs...This is one of the very first adventure strips. At times it has been one of the best. At times it has been one of the worst. The current Sunday, written and drawn by Mike Grell, is not as good as the strps drawn by the late Russ Manning, but it is much better than most of the other artists who have handled the strip since Burne Hogarth. Grell's writing captures the spirit of Burroughs. When he swiped from ERB in Warlord, I squirmed. But when he swipes from ERB in the Tarzan comic strip, it is wholly appropriate. Here we have a Tarzan who is authentic and deadly.

The daily Tarzan strip is of interest only to ERB completists. If you want it, you can get it easily enough. Send $9 a year to the McLaughlin (South Dakota) Messenger. They reprint six strips in each weekly paper (they do skip a week now and then). Currently, the daily reprints 1956 dailies by John Celardo and Dick Van Buren.

Sunday or daily, Tarzan is carried in so few papers as to be almost invisible. Write your editor.

STAR WARS Sunday and daily. Drawn by Al Williamson and written by Archie Goodwin. This is the best of the science fiction strips. It is not quite up to the quality of the other strips on this list, and is the only one of the top ten which is adapted from another medium except Tarzan. Perhaps the number ten spot should be occupied by Family Circle or by For Better or Worse. But I have a soft spot for s-f. Williamson is one of the greatest artists in comics, but his work here often seems rushed. The Goodwin story is workmanlike, and probably the best that can be done. But the story must not allow anything to happen, for fear of contradicting something in the mind of George Lucas, and so here we are, sandwiched in between A New Hope and The Empire Strikes Back, knowing what is going to come next.

I have read and enjoyed the first two adventures. But, here I stopped. Why? Because the Sunday and daily strips tell the same story, and I get the daily strips in Amazing Heroes, which is one year behind the Sunday strips in the Asbury Park Press. I which they would catch up.

If I have left out one of your favorite strips, write me and tell me about it, at Box 307, Kingston, NJ 08528. If your local newspaper has a good strip selection, especially if is is a weekly which carries six dailies of a strip, or a Sunday which carries half pages, or which has Steve Canyon ⅓ page, I want to know about it. Enclose a legal length SASE when you write, and I'll send you some free daily strips.

THE SUPER-TEAM SPIRIT

DC's SUPER-TEAMS of the 1960's

by Murray R. Ward

In our continuing series on the various super-hero teams in comics, we have already devoted entire installments to the two main teams published by DC Comics during the 1960s: the Justice League of America, and the Legion of Super-Heroes, the latter appearing in *ADVENTURE COMICS*. These were far from DC's only super-teams of the era, however. First, of course, there were the various costumed-but-not-super-powered teams of adventurers, whose exploits do not really fall within the purview of a series on *super*-teams.

The Blackhawks had continued their careers as comics heroes in an unbroken line from World War II, as DC took over their title from the defunct Quality Comics line. In the comics' "reality," of course, the switch of publishers marks the transition from the adventures of the Earth-Two versions of the characters to their Earth-One incarnations. (There were also Earth-X versions of the Blackhawks and their fellow Quality star, Plastic Man, all of whom perished in that parallel world's more devastating version of "The Big One.") A band of fliers having no closer equivalent than Marvel's Sgt. Fury and his Howling Commandos, the Blackhawks (so named for their mysterious Polish/American leader, Blackhawk) each hailed from a

different nation: Andre from France, Chuck from the U.S., Olaf from Sweden, Stanislaus from Poland, Hendrickson from Holland, and Chop Chop from China. As their popularity waned in the later 1960s, they would become secret agents and temporarily adopt super-hero-like *nommes de guerre:* Andre as Monsieur Machine, Chuck as the Listener, Olaf as the Leaper, Stan as the Golden Centurion, Hendy as the Weapons-Master, and Chops as Dr. Hands. This phase was so short-lived and so unmemorable, though, as to be virtually non-existent.

The Challengers of the Unknown, who, as hypothesized earlier in this series, served as a role model in origin and personnel for the later Fantastic Four, were also a non-powered group. Each member possessed a different set of skills: Ace Morgan was a test pilot and the team's nominal leader; Prof Haley was a skin diver and all-around brain; Red Ryan was a mountain-climber and electronics expert; and Rocky Davis was an Olympic-caliber wrestler and athlete. The Challs' closest equivalents in fantastic literature were Doc Savage's group of aides, the so-called Amazing Five—each of whom possessed his own special field of expertise in which he was unexcelled.

Together with the short-run series of the late 1960s called the Secret Six, in which a half-dozen experts in various fields were drafted as espionage agents against their wills and reported to an commander whose identity was unknown even to the members of the group itself (he or she was secretly one of their own number and possessed the code-name "Mockingbird"), the Blackhawks and the Challengers, as well as with Rip Hunter's cohorts in his time-travelling adventures, and the skin-diving Sea Devils, made up the roster of DC's non-super-hero teams.

There were, however, still other teams whose members *did* possess super-human abilities and yet who did not enjoy the popularity of the JLA and the Legion of Super-Heroes, though each group had its loyal cadre of fans.

I. ORIGINS

One of these teams was based on an idea that had been making the rounds in fan circles (such as there were in the early Silver Age) and in letters pages ever since the foundation of the Justice League. During the heyday of the Justice Society in the 1940s, the readers of *ALL-STAR COMICS* had been invited to join a fan club called "the Junior Justice Society of America." Why not a "Junior

Justice League of America" today, and why not have not only a fan club, but an actual second super-team—this one composed of the junior partners of the adult JLA members? The idea had been tried, in a manner of speaking, a couple of times in the Golden Age by other companies, when Bucky and Toro (the young aides of Captain America and the Human Torch) formed the Young Allies, and when Dusty and Roy the Super-Boy (junior partners of the Shield and the Wizard) teamed up as the Boy Buddies. DC certainly had no shortage of prospective members for such a team. Of the early Justice League members (the seven charter members and early recruit Green Arrow), all but Green Lantern and J'Onn J'Onzz had teenage counterparts. The only objection the powers-that-be at DC could mount to such an alliance was the sheer length of the proposed name "Junior Justice League of America," due to possible confusion with the magazine featuring the adventures of the adult League.

So it was that in their first "trial balloon" appearance in *THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD #54*, it was an abbreviated line-up of Kid Flash, Aqualad, and Robin (billed as a mere team-up adventure rather than as the formation of a super-team) that held forth. So popular did the long-awaited coalition of underage super-stars prove, though, that they were back in *B&B #60*, and the difficulty of the unwieldy team name was circumvented forever when they were dubbed the Teen Titans.

This was in 1964, however, and in her own feature in *ACTION COMICS*, Supergirl had just graduated high school and started her college career, marking her as being older than Robin or any of the other Titans, so she was omitted from the group. (Besides, her simultaneous membership in the 30th-century Legion of Super-Heroes was probably felt to be a possible source of confusion. As if anything could be more confusing than *Superboy's* Legion membership...) At the same time, Green Arrow, a latecomer to the JLA, was now appearing *only* in the pages of that super-team's comic (except for an occasional reprint) so the idea of using G.A.'s young helper, Speedy, in the Teen Titans seemed more trouble than it was worth. (More confusion: a team with a character named Speedy *and* a character with super-speed, who are different characters.) A trio does not a team make, however, according to comics' tradition—and besides, the Marvel teams had by this time made the idea of one female per group a commonplace. So without explanation, the Teen Titans had a fourth, distaff member in their first appearance as an officially-named super-team: Wonder Girl.

For a long time, no one could figure out who Wonder Girl really was, and nobody at DC cared enough to try to explain—if indeed they thought it could be explained. The only appearances of the teenaged Amazon prior to *B&B #60* were as parts of a series of adventures of "Impossible Tales" of *WONDER WOMAN*. In the first of that series, Wonder Woman's mother, Queen Hippolyte, used the Amazon magic snap-shot book to run together pictures of her daughter at various ages (with

pictures of the immortal Queen herself), and the result was a "Wonder Family" that existed only through the magic of trick photography. This ersatz super-team consisted of Wonder Woman, Wonder Girl (W.W. as a teenager), Wonder Tot (W.W. as a toddler), and Hippolyte (called Wonder Queen in these adventures). The Wonder Girl of the Teen Titans couldn't possibly be *that* Wonder Girl, could she? It took a concerned fan-turned-professional to provide the final answer, when Marv Wolfman penned a *"Teen Titans"* tale (in issue #22) that not only revealed W.G. as an orphaned child raised by the Amazons (who gave her her powers—via their Purple Ray—and her costume), and a real name for the first time.

Meanwhile (despite the very real possibility that he would end up appearing in comics more often than his mentor, who was beginning to miss more and more JLA meetings), Speedy was inducted, first as a frequent guest, then as a replacement for Aqualad, and eventually as a retroactive originator of the team, when they were finally give a group origin story just before being cancelled for the second time. Aqualad, meanwhile, was giving the Titans the same problems the frequently-missing Aquaman gave the Justice League: namely, what could he do in a story that had nothing to do with water? He solved that problem, and the Speedy-like dilemma of turning up for more *"TT"* cases than his adult partner did for *"JLA"* adventures, by taking a leave of absence and only reporting in when needed.

Where the Teen Titans draw their obvious inspiration from the Justice League, DC had yet another super-team whom serendipity cast in the role of imitators of Marvel's Fantastic Four and X-Men groups. Later to be linked closely with the Titans through a member common to both teams (and ironically so, given that today's New Teen Titans are most frequently compared with the new, revamped X-Men), these were the "World's Strangest Heroes," otherwise known as...the Doom Patrol.

The DP, like many a Marvel character in the early 1960s, made their debut as a new lead feature in a mystery/adventure comic, and later took over the title for their own. The book in this case was *MY GREATEST ADVENTURE*, and in 1963, in its 80th issue (at about the same time Professor X was out drafting young mutants into the X-Men) another

wheelchair-bound genius was gathering a group of human "freaks." Where Charles Xavier was bald and clean-shaven, the man called the Chief (whose true name of Dr. Niles Caulder the reader only learned much later) boasted a full beard and a head of flaming red hair. And his resultant super-team ended up looking more like the F.F. than any version of the X-Men, old or new.

Elasti-Girl was movie actress Rita Farr, whose plunge into a strange jungle pool gifted her with the combined abilities of Marvel's Giant-Man and Mr. Fantastic—she could stretch any part of her body, or change the size of her entire body, becoming tiny or a giantess at will. Her weird powers, however, not only diminished her appeal as a star of stage and screen, but as the Chief's tests showed, also shortened her lifespan. Negative Man was test pilot Larry Trainer but Larry was not Negative Man him/itself. Rather, "Neg Man," as he was nicknamed, was a humanoid-shaped electrical being which Trainor gained, after he flew an experimental plane thru a cosmic turbulence, and could release at will from his body. Negative Man, he could speed faster than light, pass through walls, and cause explosions, but the eerie duplicate had to return to Larry's body within sixty seconds, or his "parent" form would die. Furthermore, Trainor was forced to swath his entire body in special bandages, giving him the appearance of a living mummy, or his radioactive condition would destroy anyone who came too close to him. Negative Man in flight resembled nothing more than a black-and-white version of the Human Torch, but Neg Man ranks with Tower's NoMan as one of the most original super-hero concepts of the 1960s. The final original DP member was not an original character. Just as the Golden

Age Human Torch (as a super-hero concept) was reincarnated in an entirely new identity (as F.F. member Johnny Storm), so too was Robotman—known as Dr. Bob Crane (no relation to the late star of TV's *HOGAN HEROES*), aka "Paul Dennis," for years on both Earth-one and Earth-two—reborn as racing-car driver and daredevil Cliff Steele, whose body was destroyed in a car crash, but whose human brain survived in a robot body, thanks to the Chief (who was also a master inventor, electro-technician, physician and surgeon). He was the super-strong "tragic monster" character of the group, in the mold of Marvel's Thing.

The Doom Patrol might have considered themselves "Fabulous Freaks," as they were billed, but the members of DC's third and final "second-string" super-team were even further from human. Bob Haney, whose offbeat but undeniable craftsmanship was evident for years in the *BRAVE AND BOLD* team-up series, had put together the Teen Titans with artist Nick Cardy under the joint editorship of Murray Boltinoff and George Kashdan. Haney again, collaborating with eventual series writer Arnold Drake, had teamed up with artist Bruno Premiani to create the Doom Patrol. But it was another writer, as famed for his oddball concepts and unique brand of fantasy as Haney or Drake, who was to give to DC its only mechanical super-heroes. Robotman may have been a metal frame with a human brain, but Robert Kanigher, then the writer of *WONDER WOMAN* as well as many of DC's war comics, teamed with his *"WW"* co-creators Ross Andru and Mike Esposito (they of the "imaginary" Wonder Girl) to build the *METAL MEN*. The Metal Men were a band of super-heroic robots!

Created (in the world of Earth-one, of course) by Dr. Will Magnus—who by another of the strange coincidences of comics bore the same name as Gold Key's hero who *battled* robots—the Metal Men were six in number, each possessing the abilities of the metallic element from which the robot took its name, and each possessing a single identifying personality trait. Gold, the brain and leader of the group in the absence of creator "Doc," had the super-malleability to stretch himself into shapes even Plastic Man never thought to attempt. Lead, slow-witted but loyal, was most useful as a shield against radiation. Iron, the strong silent type, was the group muscle-man. He and Lead were good friends and frequent teammates within the group, the latter often following Iron's lead in action, being unable to think quickly enough to formulate his own battle plan. Mercury was the boastful braggart of the team, forever regaling the others with the wonders of being "the *only* metal that's liquid at room temperature"—a trait that proved a liability more often than an asset in battle. Tin, whose favorite trick was to contain an enemy by taking the form of a huge tin can, was the humble Metal Man, speaking with an interminable stammar and possessing an incurable inferiority complex. And the requisite female member was Platinum, though she preferred to be called Tina. With ductile powers similar to those of Gold, she would most often entwine adversaries in a cocoon formed from her legs and torso, but the only one she really wanted to trap was her inventor, Doc Magnus. An almost endlessly recurring theme in the Metal Men's adventures and misadventures was Tina's romantic pursuit of poor beleaguered Doc, victim of a "Pygmalion" nightmare in reverse. Later in the series, an added subplot involved Tin's attempt to end his feelings of uselessness and insecurity by inventing his own girlfriend, a second tin robot, called "Nameless" while the *"MM"* staff conducted a never-resolved readers's contest to decide on a proper name for her.

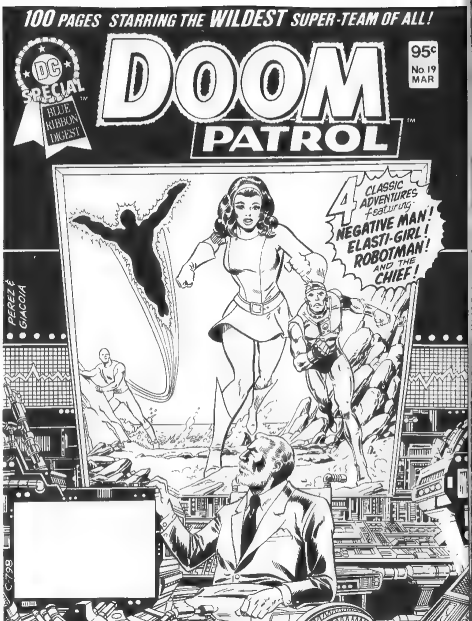
II. ORGANIZATION

Returning to our set of designations established earlier in this series of articles, it should be noted that the DC second-string teams constituted one of each type: the Teen Titans were obviously a "formulated" team whose members were chosen from other strips and banded together; the Doom Patrol were a "hybrid" group, with separate origins but common ground in their status as "freaks;" and the Metal Men, robots all, were a "common-origin" team, all born in the same smelter.

Once the Titans had established themselves as a permanent team, they set up some "house rules" a bit different from those of the Justice League. Robin was the organizer of the group and the

permanent leader; the only time during the series that he was absent, the team was already operating under the guidance of an adult mentor, philanthropic millionaire Mr. Jupiter. For a time in the middle 1960s, the Titans comprised a perfect one-on-one match-up with Marvel's second team of Avengers, each group have a non-super-powered acrobatic leader (Robin for Captain America), an archer (Speedy for Hawkeye), a super-speedster (Kid Flash for Quicksilver), and a mysterious female (Wonder Girl for the Scarlet Witch, whose origins and last name no one was sure of, either). (If only the Avengers could have drafted Sub-mariner to stand opposite Aqualad...) Rather than battle super-villains (at least, not deliberately) or patrol the globe, the Teen Titans lived up to the first part of their name—they dealt almost exclusively in teen-related problems. Adults in trouble could call on the JLA for help, but kids would have their own private crusaders in the Titans. Like the other two teams discussed here, they were specialists; the DP battled fellow freaks, while the Metal Men fought menacing robots.

The Teen Titans would go through four separate incarnations, or "periods" in their existence, three of these punctuated by the cancellation and restoration of their magazine. The early Titans met in a Titans Lair resembling both the Batcave and the JLA Secret Sanctuary. A cave within a cliffside, it was long hidden behind a billboard advertising the mid-1960s *BATMAN* TV show, which swung back to allow the Titans' helicopter to emerge. In their second "relevant" phase, inaugurated under editor Dick Giordano, the group picked up its first new recruits as the Hawk and the Dove migrated from their own cancelled series, and newcomers Lilith (a beautiful young telepath) and Mal (a black street-fighter) signed up. With Robin away at college, the others tried super-heroing sans powers and costumes for awhile under the guidance of Mr. Jupiter, and operated out of his corporate network. After an interim period during which their title ceased publication, the Titans were back, with a disco-and-restaurant called "Gabriel's Horn," run by musicians Speedy and Mal, as their front, and enough new members to form a second team, which led to a temporary California arm of the group called "Titans West." After their title was dropped a second time, the Titans cameback for a fourth phase as the current "New Teen Titans," which teams original members Robin, Wonder



Girl, and Kid Flash, with Beast Boy of the Doom Patrol—now called the Changeling—and three new characters, Cyborg, Raven, and Starfire, gathered in an impressive new "Titans Tower" HQ.

If the Titans metaphorically "died" and were "reborn," the Doom Patrol experienced a death and rebirth that was anything but metaphorical. The group remained with the original four members, operating out of an undistinguished brownstone in the middle of a large city, and led by their organizer, the Chief. Like the Marvel teams, they bickered and almost broke up more than once, only to find that they needed each other to survive in a world of "normals." The only "line-up changes" involved a pair of "part-time" members who did more to disrupt our heroes' lives than to strengthen their team. Beast Boy, mentioned earlier as one of the current Teen Titans, was an orphan with green skin and a penchant for changing himself into any kind of animal life on a whim. Because he was underage, the DP hesitated to take him in and expose him to the dangers they faced regularly in their missions, a difficulty he also faced when he tried to join the Teen Titans in the 1960s. The other troublesome newcomer was Mento (in reality millionaire Steve Dayton) who had invented a helmet that gave him telekinetic talents. His reasons for involving himself with the fantastic freaks were as unorthodox as they were simple: he loved Rita Farr and wanted to marry her. The two finally did tie the

knot, and promptly adopted Gar (Beast Boy) Logan, much to Dayton's consternation. Engaged in countless domestic squabbles (Rita insisted on keeping up her super-heroine career after marriage) in between battles with ever-recurrent foes such as General Immortus (an immortal villain whose machinations had originally crippled the Chief), Gargaux (a green-skinned alien invader), and the Brotherhood of Evil (who, as fate would have it, premiered simultaneously with the X-Men's nemeses, the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants), the Doom Patrol nonetheless were one big happy, if wacky, family. But it was not to last...

Other super-heroes lost their titles to cancellation and were revived a few years later, as with the Teen Titans. Always different from the "ordinary" super-heroes, the Doom Patrol, in what was scheduled to be their final issue, did the unthinkable: they died! Negative Man, Elasti-Girl, the Chief, and Robotman were killed, sacrificing themselves that innocents might survive. Beast Boy and Mento lived to hunt down the perpetrators, but the *DP* comic was gone, and their survivors' story not to be told for years to come. In fact, it was only after nine years that the readers learned that one original DP member had survived, as well. Robotman, his metal body nearly destroyed, crawled ashore to fall at the feet of none other than Metal Men creator Doc Magnus, who rebuilt him, allowing him to join forces briefly with three new characters, Celsius, Tempest, and Negative Woman, in a "new Doom Patrol," featured in *SHOWCASE #94-6* in 1977.

The Metal Men, being true robots, went Robotman and the DP one better. They were destroyed and rebuilt constantly, every other adventure ending with Doc in the "Metal Recovery Room," as his lab was called, putting our heroes back together again like cybernetic Humpty-Dumptys. As time wore on, though, the robot super-heroes fell on hard times, sales-wise, as did most of their comics brethren. Rather than cancel the book, a face-lift was attempted by DC, and the Metal Men faced a more permanent kind of "death" and "rebirth." With Doc Magnus lost to them (first believed to be dead, then transformed into the deranged puppet of a dictator), the metal band came to be distrusted by the public, and were finally hunted down and seemingly destroyed for good. Actually, though, one Mr. Conan (another philanthropist similar to the Titans' Mr. Jupiter, and no relation to Robert E. Howard's barbarian) took them under his guidance, and provided them with human "cover" identities from which they could emerge to combat crime as the Metal Men, albeit furtively. Despite this ploy, their comic eventually succumbed to cancellation, anyway, and when it was revived briefly in the 1970s, the Metal Men (having appeared with Batman in *BRAVE AND BOLD* several times in the interim) were back to their robotic selves, Doc and all, before being dropped from the line-up again.

Today, of the three "other" DC super-teams of the 1960s, only the Teen Titans survive in a current incarnation, ironically as the most popular fan title in the DC stable. The Doom Patrol's second version has apparently broken up, at least to the extent of Robotman going on his own again, although he was recently reunited with Changeling and Mento to take final vengeance on the DP's murderers after over a decade, in the pages of, of all comics, the *NEW TEEN TITANS*. The Metal Man live, and are liable to turn up as Superman's or Batman's teammates in *DC COMICS PRESENTS* or *THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD* when least expected. At DC, as at Marvel, old super-characters never die, they just come back in other characters' books. ●

III. MEMBERSHIP

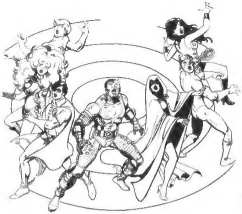
THE TEEN TITANS
Founded: *BRAVE AND BOLD #54/60*
Disbanded: following *TEEN TITANS #43*
Regrouped: *TEEN TITANS #44*
Disbanded: *TEEN TITANS #53*
Regrouped: *DC COMICS PRESENTS #26*

1. *ROBIN* (Richard "Dick" Grayson)
Charter Member: *BRAVE AND BOLD #54/60; TEEN TITANS #53*

2. *KID FLASH* (Wallace "Wally") West)
Charter Member: *BRAVE AND BOLD #54/60; TEEN TITANS #53*

3. *AQUALAD* (real name unknown)
Charter member: *BRAVE AND BOLD #54/60; TEEN TITANS #53*

4. *WONDER GIRL* (Donna Troy)
"Charter" member: *BRAVE AND BOLD #60; TEEN TITANS #53*



5. *SPEEDY* (Roy Harper)
"Charter" member: *TEEN TITANS #53; TEEN TITANS #4*

6. *HAWK* (Hank Hall)
Joins: *TEEN TITANS #25*

7. *DOVE* (Don Hall)
Joins: *TEEN TITANS #25*

8. *LILITH* (last name unknown)
Joins: *TEEN TITANS #25*

9. *MAL DUNCAN*
Joins: *TEEN TITANS #26*; becomes *GUARDIAN* in *TEEN TITANS #44*; becomes *HORNBLOWER* in *TEEN TITANS #45*

10. *GNARRK* (John Gnarrk)
Joins: *TEEN TITANS #50* (Titans West)

11. *HARLEQUIN* (Duella Dent; formerly THE JOKER'S DAUGHTER)
Joins: *TEEN TITANS #46*

12. *BEAST BOY/CHANGELING* (Garfield "Gar" Logan)
Joins: *TEEN TITANS #50* (Titans West); *DC COMICS PRESENTS #26* (regular team) see also *DOOM PATROL*

13. *BUMBLEBEE* (Karen Beecher)
Joins: *TEEN TITANS #48*

14. *BAT-GIRL* (Betty Kane)
Joins: *TEEN TITANS #50* (Titans West)

15. *GOLDEN EAGLE* (Charley Parker)
Joins: *TEEN TITANS #50* (Titans West)

16. *RAVEN* (her real name)
Joins: *DC COMICS PRESENTS #26*

17. *STARFIRE (III)* (Kory Anders; Princess Koriand'r)
Joins: *DC COMICS PRESENTS #26*

18. *CYBORG* (Victor Stone)
Joins: *DC COMICS PRESENTS #26*

THE DOOM PATROL
Founded: *MY GREATEST ADVENTURE #80*
Destroyed: *DOOM PATROL #121*

1. *THE CHIEF* (Dr. Niles Caulder)
Dies: *DOOM PATROL #121*
2. *ELASTI-GIRL* (Rita Farr Dayton)
Dies: *DOOM PATROL #121*
3. *NEGATIVE MAN* (Larry Trainor)
Dies: *DOOM PATROL #121*
4. *ROBOTMAN* (Cliff Steele)

8. BEAST BOT (I) (Garfield "Gar" Logan)
Joins: *DOOM PATROL #99* (unofficially)

6. *MENTO* (Steve Dayton)
Never officially joins.

THE "NEW" DOOM PATROL
Founded: *SHOWCASE #94*

7. *CELSIUS* Arani Caulder)
Joins: *SHOWCASE #94*

8. *TEMPEST* (Joshua Clay)
Joins: *SHOWCASE #94*

9. *NEGATIVE WOMAN* (Valentina Vostok)
Joins: *SHOWCASE #94*

THE METAL MEN
Founded: *SHOWCASE #37*

1. *GOLD* (adopts human identity as "Guy Gilden")

2. *LEAD* (adopts human identity as "Ledby Hand")

3. *IRON* (adopts human identity as "Jon Mann")

4. *MERCURY* (adopts human identity as "Mercurio")

5. *TIN* (adopts human identity as "Tinker")

6. *PLATINUM* (Tina) (adopts human identity as "Tina Platt")

7. *DOC* (Dr. Will Magnus)

8. *"NAMELESS"*
Joins: *METAL MEN #13*

For those wishing to know more about the Teen Titans, the Doom Patrol, and the Metal Men, be advised that these three teams, by a cosmic coincidence, are the stars of the series featured in Volume Two of the *DC COMICS INDEX SERIES* (Vol. 1 features the Justice League and Super Friends), on sale later in 1982, and written by this very author. (Free plug!)

Next issue, Super-Team Spirit concludes its look at the 1960s (finally!) with an examination of the super-teams *not* published by DC and Marvel: Tower's T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents, Archie's Mighty Crusaders, the Harvey heroes, and even a super-group from Dell Comics (huh?). Be here. Aloha!

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"THE DJINN"
by
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and
Tom Orzechowski

Chapter Two

Tony Coyne and Ali Pasha pursue the Djinn and Ali's captive bride into the depths of a trap-laden temple, in *"Claustrophobia."*

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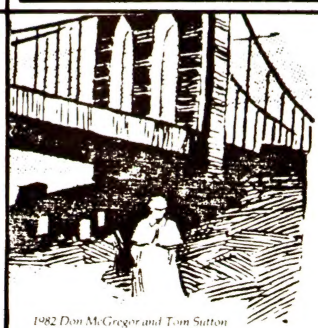
"The Hounds of Hell Theory"
Chapter Two

Alexander and Penelope encounter a houseful of suspects in their investigation. Will they succeed—or fall to another attack?



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by
Don McGregor, Tom Sutton,
and
Susan Fox

"RAYDER"
by
Mark Evanier, Mike Sekowsky, Alan Gordon,
and
Tom Orzechowski

Reb Rayder continues his search for Doctor W. and a new Loyita —only to find *"The Creationists."*

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